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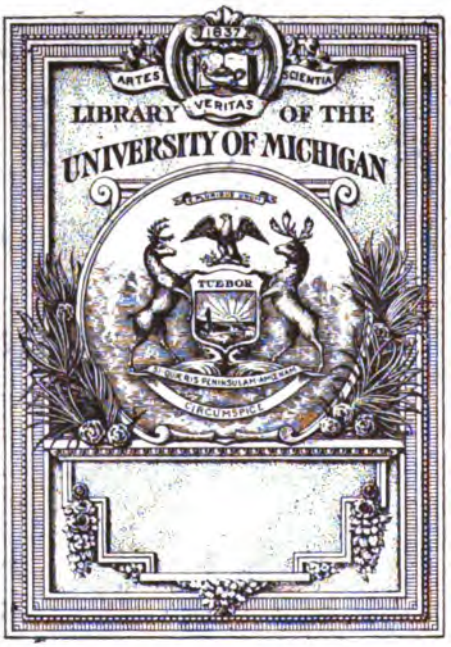
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WIDDICOMBE

WIDDICOMBE

BY

M. P. WILLCOCKS

Mary Patricia

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD

LONDON & NEW YORK MDCCCCV

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WIDDICOMBE

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Chapter I

Romeo and Juliet of the New Age

WIDDICOMBE in the West Country lay in the grip of the white frost which had been gathering for twenty-four hours. The straggling village crouches on the slope of a wide valley, with clumps of vine-clad, jessamine-haunted cottages looking downward to the river Widey, whose murmur can be heard from beneath the trees which hide its course. Rivers, like human lives, survive countless moods; the Widey in its youth knows the lower slopes of the bare, primeval moorland where the utmost man's hand can effect in surface alteration is the burning or "swaling" of a few acres of gorse and heather, till the face of the moor looks black and barren for a time. This is a land of many waters for half the year: the lap and swirl of the brown streams and the subtler gurgles of the peat moss, as the bog-cotton bows to the oncoming flow, fill the ear with a ceaseless murmur that is full of peace; in summer the slumberous whisper of the heath-bells sounds near the head of Widey water as it

slips downwards to its middle course, where, ringed about with woodland in the deep valley it has cut for itself, it makes its way through the midst of pasture, clover, and cornfields, where the lap of Mother Earth is full of gifts and her face of smiles. Like the features of a strong man marked with lines of care, the Widey carries tokens of the toil of former years: pebbles and boulders deposited along its bed and the very depth of the gorge through which it flows testify to the hard labour it has known. But while above the wind coming from the moors is keen and breathes of heather and peat, down below the tree-roofs the air is heavy with the smell of moss and of fern, the sunlight richly golden, and the cascades of water, cool in the hottest summer days, so murmurously still that the hum of a strayed and belated bee is startling, like a sudden cry of alarm.

But bees and sunlight are only pleasant fancies on a misty winter day: quite other beauty was before the eyes of the girl who passed out of the village into the woodland path by the river one January afternoon. Every tiny tendril wore mail of fluted hoar-frost; every leaf of last year's summer had its frilled edge of the same opaque crystal. The oaks had been caught with their brown leaves still on them, and through what one thought to be stillness might be heard a constant whispering rustle, sibilant, incessant, yet peaceful, broken only by a bird twitter from time to time; it was the perpetual fall of the oak leaves under the combined action of the frost-grip and the steadily blowing breeze.

Underneath the rustle, like the dream of a sound, was heard the patter of the dust from the frost-mail.

Through the mist the tree-trunks loomed like sentinels and only the tiniest frost-feathers waved in the wind. There was no sun to be seen; it was only felt in the pearliness of the air wherever a glade formed an open space. From a point where the river fell in a cascade over boulders piled breast-high a steam was rising in visible form to join the misty over-world, shaping to the fancy wraith-like forms of naiads or dryads. Soon the mist had added another shape to the white scene: every thread of wool on the girl's serge gown, every hair on the fur of her cap, every russet lock round her forehead, bore its tiny white fluting; only cheeks and lips and eyes flashed forth the glorious challenge of merry life into the white world of death. It formed a picture of the ever-young humanity that wrests from the old forces of cold and pain the warm joys of the dancing hours. As she went a song was on her lips; the quiet was too intense for loud singing, and the rabbit who scudded away with his white scut showing fawn in the dimness never heard a note of it.

> "What do you bring, old life, old life?
> What do you bring? quoth she."

But the stillness conquered: the song died away as the spirit of the place crept closer to her.

At last she stood where the trees dwindled to a single line of oaks by the river-side; here the ivy-clad walls of

an ancient lime-kiln projected into the road. She passed round it into a chasm which had once been a quarry, and which was entered by a cleft guarded by two great laurels forming a natural arch over the door. Sheer up, many hundred feet above her, the quarry walls rose, not bare and naked, for nature loves no rugged outlines in this land, but a maze of ghostly trunks and of festoons of ivy and laurel. The sky-roof could not be seen, only a shaft of ghost-light pierced from above into the mist. It was as if white Silence stood with finger on lip and waited: the brooding quiet kept the girl spell-bound beneath the laurel arms. The spirit that dwells in wood and field and homestead never speaks so clearly to any race as to the western.

At last the stress of desire broke the spell, and she moved further inward, till she stood looking upwards right into the centre of the pearly gleam from the hidden sky; the frost-dew gathered more quickly on her figure till she might have been taken for a wood spirit. Suddenly she lifted her face a-tilt to the light and clasped her hands under her chin, so that the tension of taut muscle in her frame could be felt all along the nerves; the shaft of light on her grew pearlier till the fog particles were like ghostly motes that danced from her lips to the upper world.

The face that looked up was no nymph face, but born of the good red earth for goodly earth purposes that suit well enough with ruddy masses of hair, skin like the cream of the privet flower, with the sun's hand shown

in a freckle or two set cunningly near the eyes, that gleamed with changing lights, as do the pebbles when the moor-stream crawls or swirls above them.

Perhaps the widest difference in the quality of human personalities lies in the grip wherewith they severally lay hold on life: some, like the Norman duke who ruled two kingdoms, grasp all, from the rushes of the birth-chamber to the kingly sceptre; others hold feebly from the first and at last are unlinked from the earth long before the death of the body, — these were the saints of earlier ages. But all the passive saints of Outer Wessex are imported from over the borders; the true children of this land are the possessors of passions that reflect the vivid skies, and of easy humours that match the lush vegetation, but also of a strenuous force that blows from the untamed wastes of Atlantic surges beating against the iron north coast. The annals of the long line of quaint Cornish saints show more of the fiery outburning of spiritual passion than the agelong patience of the monkish ideal; converted rakes very many of them were, who took the strong force of desire within for the devil himself. And who shall gainsay them? At any rate, in the faint echoes of these long-forgotten souls there often breathes more life than in more pretentious records, and still the land brings forth the quick, who always escape the torpor of death-in-life; of these quick was Silphine Mary Rosdew, among whose ancestors had been many seafarers who had gained the epithet "dhu," black, for other reasons than swarthiness.

Just now her large, sensitive lips were curved upwards to match the upward poise of her body, and it seemed that little prayers in material form might be seen running up the shaft of light. She prayed that the wills of other folks might be turned aside like water before her own will, as the swords of the enemy when the hero comes on the scene in the old romances. As she stood thus, through the stillness, clearly, yet muffled by the layers of fog, came the sound of the church clock in the distance, — one, two, three: three o'clock of a dim and frosty day. Possibly three o'clock that is, for in valleys where the railway does not penetrate, the time of day comes to be measured approximately, and in summer dandelion clocks are nearly as useful as the cottage timekeeper.

She turned quickly, for with the sound came the consciousness of human presence: the white Silence fled, for she never stays with two.

"As pat to the time as if the curtain had just risen," said the new-comer, with a laugh of satisfaction at his own exactitude; he was a man who derived most of his satisfactions, which were many rather than great, from a sense of exact accomplishment, of a logical fitting of the deed to the occasion. His small, perfectly formed handwriting was, in this matter, a better index to his character than his appearance, which was that of a man whose forebears had been town-dwellers for many generations, men born to microscopic poring over books, varied mainly by street vistas for width of gaze. His face was only redeemed from meanness by a high forehead over which a

long drab lock fell, in meditation, almost to his round spectacles, — just an ugly man with a high forehead on most occasions, but let the glasses slip forward unheeded on nose, the side of the left thumb slip, for cud purposes, under the sandy moustache, and one could see the real man of the grey-green, brooding eyes, weighing forces, calculating possibilities; in short, like his age, taking thought for a far-distant morrow. In another century than this, the tall, narrow face would have belonged to a man who spent his time building a prickly hedge of restrictions along the narrow path set for the wayfaring man; in this he concerned himself mainly with the condition of that wayfaring man in the matter of bread, beer, and houses; for example, in wages. Essentially a man of detail, in the nineteenth century he believed in political economy; in the fourteenth he would have given his mind to the snatching of brands from the everlasting bonfire,—in short, a sincere man of narrow emotions, due to personal character, and of over-wide thoughts, due to the moral conceptions of his century, especially that sense of the responsibility laid upon the present of giving birth to a more worthy future.

Silphine never looked at John Saxon after an absence without seeing the red-washed walls of a workman's club-room and his face standing out against the gas-glare in front of the rows of men so marked by sordid care and even more sordid joy that few faces, save those of the mere brutes, were as nature had made them; over against them stood this man, neither broken on the wheel of the

world's coarse needs nor brutalised by its appetites, though fretted by its contradictions and worn by the cramping fetters of circumstance. Just for the moment she had seen unconsciously a vision of the free city where men and women are laws unto themselves, because they have all, not one here and there, entered into full possession of themselves. In Silphine's view her lover stood pledged to fight in the agelong strife for the city of God on earth, but with strange weapons, — the election contests and the co-operative movements that, seen only from the Mount of Pisgah, become transfigured.

This moment in the club-room was the first occasion on which Silphine had breathed that rarefied air in which the far-distant ends only of the human journey are apparent, so that the centuries roll up like a scroll and the mind asserts for the twinkling of an eye its kinship with the divine. East and west and north and south, John Saxon had opened windows for her to peer through; and the next step, from divine exaltation to adoration of the agent, was very easy. The nimbus of the saints was round that sandy head for her, though one of iron rather than of bright gold, since the vision splendid of to-day is no far-off glitter on the celestial hills, but just a light shed on the dwellers on the plain.

"And the curtain has just risen, too, on a new act for us," he said, taking her arm and turning impatiently towards the opening of the chasm. "As I wrote to you, I've had an offer of research work on a new social history series. It's honest work of its kind, and will be

bread and butter for a time; but it means going up to town."

"And that spells parting," said Silphine, nervousness making her dry upper lip cling to her teeth. "I can't leave Granny Rosdew, for nobody else can manage her, and she's as dearly fond of her own way as any child."

"Anyhow," said he, "I must go alone. This only gives foothold for one. No, we shall have to wait. As it is, we don't see much of each other, with you in Widdicombe and with me in Plymouth."

"When do you go?" she asked, vainly battling against a sense of rebuff at the ease with which he settled what ought to have been painful to him.

"In a few weeks, or months, I can't exactly tell yet. I fancy a University Settlement. The pater expects me back shortly — after a diet of husks," he added drily.

John Saxon's father was a Baptist minister, the real passion of whose life was for Icelandic literature, if passion were possible to anyone so chill. Though facing constantly the strange human pageant, he had always retained the feeling of being a stranger in that splendid theological temple of hope which is to the Christian "my Father's house." He would have been far happier hammering exactitude into little boys' brains than in facing the problem of sins for which he had never himself had any inclination and of doubts which were but phantoms to him. As a reward, however, for diligent treading of the way in which he had not been intended to walk, Mr. Saxon had secured a competence and a son

Silphine had been standing stock-still, gazing with wide eyes at him; at his last words her eyes leapt and then fell back into their former stillness.

"I 'm a townsman," he went on; "you 're a country-woman. You are beautiful; I am emphatically — not. You are, at present, a bundle of sensations; I sometimes have a glimmering of thought. Ergo, our descendants ought to be complete human beings; we are the antitheses of each other. Why," he said, catching her hands with froggy ones that made her shiver, "I can feel the warm blood coursing through every vein, and this hair is sweet with the very scent of health. You 're like the field which the Lord hath blessed, every inch of you. I always think so when I see you among the short-sighted, flat-chested neuters they call girls."

"No, no, no," she cried, pushing him away with one hand; "I want you to love me for myself alone, not for what I shall be or do. I don't only want to be something that will do good to others. I can't get up on those heights."

"But you can't help yourself. You came to me that way. I heard the old carrier say, as you passed one day, 'That maid puts me in mind of a fine field of tetties, that a do.'"

There was a silence for a time.

"Come now, child," he began, "let everything but this go: that the way the poorest life is lived makes all the difference to the way the mass lives. God!" he said passionately, "is it only microbes of disease we breathe

from one another and never a big thought or a true notion? I 'll cut my throat when I believe that."

"But I want to get all the joys."

"And the greatest of all is to live with that consciousness. Lovers and sweets, can't you see how such a thought makes all these seem small?"

"For a moment I can, and then — it all goes. 'T is too high for me."

"See here," he said, emphasising with two outstretched fingers laid in the palm of his left hand, "see here. There are people all round you getting ready for their coffins long before they need: business and house and all the tiny little interests they spend their strength on; narrower, narrower, they grow, shut up in seven rooms with four or five people. Come out into the big fellowship where all men and women are brothers and sisters, from under the roofs to the open sky. Widen your life till your own affairs don't loom so large that they dwarf the thousand-times greater affairs that are round yours."

"I know," she answered eagerly; "'t is like living one's life to the sound of trumpets. Don't you know what it is when one 's listening to a great thrill of music that carries one on and on? I want that always, — something to make dulness sunshine, to make Gran's tempers sweet and the rain beautiful. When you speak so, I understand."

"Shade of Walt Whitman," he laughed, "it 's *joie de vivre* you 're in love with, not with me or with a thought.

But that 's all right; it 's just your splendid health and spirits," he finished, with the crease of his features that stood for a smile.

It was his parting bewilderment, for Silphine would not accompany him back to the village, where every curtained window masked a battery of curious eyes.

Two gates there are into joy,—the gate of the mind, which turns but tardily on its hinges and with many a raucous protest at disturbance; and the gate of the body, which flings wide its ruddy portals to the first new-comer. Silphine, like all girls who have received the inheritance of a splendid body, knew the joys of colour, scent, and, above all, of movement. She remembered long nights after dancing when she was "alive" all night, lapped in the bliss of perfect circulation,—a bliss which the slowest winter dawn only diminished feebly hour by hour as the hands of the clock stole onward. Thin sounds of bells across clear air, the gay challenge of the hearth-fire springing to the moonlight, the field scents, as the west wind flung itself against her,—all earth's joyous solicitations came living to her senses: truly a glorious inheritance.

But this other vision of the thought-world, of the far-reaching powers given to her womanhood, this vision that came with shifting pictures of crowds, of struggle, of great cities and a future bearing fruit to far-off generations,—all this left her cold and trembling.

Her lover's words had turned a spiritual telescope on the solemn vistas of the universe of man,—small lives,

the merest asteroids, but still so endless in succession in the dark, backward abysm, and still more endless in the awful chasm of the future. Her first instinct was fear, her second, homesickness; she turned quickly in the direction of Widdicombe; the out-of-doors was too vast, even the well-known fields where in the morning each shaggy body would leave an impression of itself against the rest of the grass. She wanted a small room, the smaller the better, and a big fire; the wide fields lead at length to the towns, where the long stretches of light are broken by tall buildings. It was significant that she could express nothing of her real sensations to John Saxon: she was a country girl and, moreover, self-reliant.

Suddenly out of the gathering darkness a circle of yellow light began to flicker slightly from side to side of the path. It came from a horn lantern; at last it was lifted higher, and she saw the "Newgate ruff" and simple features of a villager.

"I thought I seed 'ee down along," he began, preparing for a yarn; "if so be as you 've no objections, I 'll traipse along with 'ee."

"Certainly, Jan," said Silphine, eying the inscription, "Ferris and Sons, Widdicombe Flour Mills," which he wore across his shoulders by reason of the sack in which he was wrapped; "I shall be glad of company."

"Maister 's bad," he said with conversational intent. "Ah, well, all of us, I reckon, must live as long as Tantrum Boggis's old mare."

"And how long was that?"

"Why, till her died. But, there, you'm more of a mind to hear tell of living than of dying, I'll warn."

"I don't think I know much about that yet."

"Well, 't is a poorish trade, too, come to think upon it," said the ancient pessimist, with a histrionic sigh, "getting up afore 't is light and scratting away for dear life and little enough to show for it. Then there's the winters and the hard dyings and the long illnesses; but, there, 't is all ordained, missie, as I tell my Jenny when her do go on about her bad legs, and terruble bad they be, too. ''T is ordained, Jenny,' say I, ''t is all ordained.'"

"Yes," said Silphine, feeling only slightly cheered by Jan's simple view of the hobble of being alive, "but, all the same, why should it be ordained just so?"

"Why, that's what her do say, too. Her says, says her, 'Jan, you be a fule, with your "'T is ordained." 'T is like a dratted parrot.' Doctor, he comes along and he says 't is the damp and the hard living that makes her legs so bad; so her ups and says, 'Why should poor folks have damp and hard living and rich folk dry and soft living?' But I allays tell her 't is ordained."

"But why? Jan, why?"

"Why? says a, why? Well, I reckon the girt folks knaw what's good for poor wake mortals, and I says to Jenny, ''T is ordained, sure 'nuff.'"

This was the very fireside purring of fatalism; it seemed to take one into very cosy places, and her heart

yearned over it as the stuff of thought she had known since childhood, — how much easier than the far-seeking questions which would not even allow one to fall in love comfortably. Gran thought something like this, though she was usually deemed an original thinker, but it was all in the country air, and as sweet to her as the cool wind in one's face.

"But young maids' minds run on their joes," said Jan; "I saw yours down street to-day. Rare and sandy, too; I can't call to mind that ever I saw a sandier," he went on, running a ruminating finger over his chin. "Now, Jenny never could abide a sandy one. 'Give me black, brown, or grey,' I can mind her saying twenty times, 'but none of your sandies for me.' But, sandy or no, 'tis all one when your time comes, and 't is no matter what a man do, so his time is n't come. Hot, baked meat every day would n't fetch 'em," concluded he, decisively, with all the field-labourer's appreciation of "cooked trade" after cold bacon and cheese.

What an outlook on happiness had this old man, when everything was stuff o' the conscience to John Saxon who could neither eat nor love like other men, she thought pettishly. She determined to throw off his yoke for the time, at least, and revel in the Pagan feel still left in remote Devon life, with its great cheery kitchens and abundant meat and drink: the old man was the ballad-monger of the village.

"Say to me, Jan," she said coaxingly, "that old courting song that Jenny does not like."

They were near the village now, and the disks of lighted windows began to flicker through the curtain of damp. Jan stuck his only available thumb into the armhole of his waistcoat and regretted the pipe and armchair which usually accompanied such recitations, while Silphine prepared to enjoy the frank carnality of the old country monologue: it was a change after world theories.

"Joney, my dear, will 'ee have poor Nob?
For I 'm on a courting job.
I love thee well; I 'd fight for thee.
Iss, that I would.
I love thee well, fay, yes, I do.
Us bain't so hugeous smart as some
Girt folks that go to kirk.
You 'll find us honest, right down,
Although thee has n't got a gown,
Nor stockings fine, nor shoe.
A man may have the best of hearts,
Although no clitterlings to his shoes,
Nor lace the gentry wear.
Now, prithee, Jone, don't blush;
For such I would n't give a rush.
Nor don't run and quat like hare,
Or hide away like partridges in stubble,
For I can't turmoil and lose my rest;
I can't afford the trouble.
Flaish and dumpling every day,
And o' Sundays let me say,
We 'll have a hot squab pie,
And sometimes boil and fry.

And as for zider, Joney,
You 'll have enough to tire thy muzzle.
I 'll make thee a good husband.
Come now, say din and din.
But if thee wain't, go hang thyself, my Jone;
I 'll have thy sister Mally."

The sentiment was of the earth, earthy, but she relished the old-time savour; the partridges in stubble called up the image of the tawny fields against the blue-grey mistiness of an English autumn, and the sweeps of cold wind driving one so pleasantly back to the "flaish and dumpling," to say nothing of the "zider," that drink with a tang, worth all the languors of Moselle to the Devon born. And to leave all this for a city where, it appeared, one could n't sigh for a man or hate a woman without searching thought.

"A quiet un, that Joney," said Jan, resuming the tone of conversation after the professional drone; "that sort 's dull, most mortal. I 'd ruther have a woman take and heave the bellises at me than sit as if her last day was a-coming along."

"But Jenny talks a deal," said Silphine, to whom Jenny, Jan's wife, had been nurse.

"Ay, ay, but there 's bin others," said Jan, darkly; "what I say about wimmen is, that the men, they 'm the mate, and the wimmen, they 'm the dumpling, only time and again the dumpling scalds your mouth. But your quiet sort 's the dumpling with the apple left out."

"Well, the Lord made all," said Silphine, as they parted at Granny Rosdew's gate.

"So they says," answered Jan; there were evidently limits even to his sense of fatalism, that cave in which man has in all ages sought a refuge from the storms of responsibility.

Chapter II

Speed the Parting Guest

THREE weeks later the one downstairs room of Jenny Hammick's cottage was in deep shadow as Silphine stepped into it, and the big iron latch rose beneath her hand with a startling clatter in the midst of the hush that brooded within. Stealthily she closed the door behind her, so that the latch fell with a protesting creak as she dropped it. The wood fire-brands, laid lightly on one another in the open chimney-place, burnt blue at the edge of the stealing flames, and the feathery ash had deposited itself in layers with untouched regularity. A big black crock hung by a chain, not over the fire, but at one side, and the water in it was just sending off a faint steam. Through the windows, one in a line with the hearth, and the other at the side, could be seen the moonlight throwing patches like snow where free from the shadow of the houses.

The dressers to the left of the door loomed faintly, but the polished staircase caught the still fire-glow and spoke; one knew that in the room above was the interest of the moment.

Silphine drew a three-legged milking-stool to the fire, flung off her cloak, and held up cold hands to the blaze. All this was done quietly; the old room was waiting, and she waited too. One could see that she listened; her lips were tightly drawn together, and the fire flashed in her eyes, as a low moan sounded through the gaping beams of the floor above. Presently a slow tread came down the stairs, a tread in which both feet were set every time on each step of the stairs. An old woman appeared, holding up a candle to guide her tottering steps. A tightly goffered cap shaded with its edge the hooked nose, the sharp chin, and the deeply sunk eyes, which now looked straight ahead almost in the set gaze of the blind.

Jenny was not blind, however, and suffered herself to be pulled into the beehive chair by her visitor, who laid two strong hands on the old wrinkled ones.

"How is he, nurse?" whispered Silphine. Jan had caught a chill on the day of the frost-fog, and it had struck "innerd."

"Ah, he'll soon be in Beelzebub's bosom, my dear. Leastways, I mean Abram's. He allays was a worrit to me, was my old Jan, and it sims he's going out same as he's allays bin, — a worrit to the last."

"Whatever do you mean, Jenny? You know you've always been so proud of his memory for verses, and he so ill now."

"Iss, my dear, that's it. He's going fast, and he's worriting to the last. There's been rigs o' Dover with 'en this forenoon, and I made it all so plain and vitty."

"Uncle Cornelius told me how ill he'd turned this morning, so I came in to see if I could do anything to comfort you."

"Iss, a won't last the night. A's been tending the pigs in his mind half the day and a has n't laid finger to pig's bucket for nigh upon five year. Between that a's been argying fit to make a body's head go scat."

"What about?"

"Why, you see, dearie, 't is like this here. My old Jan, he's going home; and there's my boy Billy, he went home nigh upon forty years agone. I never bore but the one, and I seed 'en crushed afore my eyes, a little chap; a simmed like gold that morning when a runned out — and then they brought 'en in."

"Yes, I know, you used to tell me about it when I would n't go to sleep on windy nights. But what about Jan to-day?"

"Well, I'd got it all fixed up that now Jan was going up along, he'd see the boy and tell 'en how I'd thought upon 'en all the forty year come Michaelmas, me having borne but the one."

"So, now, that's all right, is n't it, Jan can do that?"

"No, but 't is n't," said the quavering voice; "'t is n't, for Jan will have it that he can't go rambling and scrambling over heaven to find my Bill, with his rheumatics and all."

"But he won't have rheumatics there, will he, Jenny, should you think?"

"That's just what I can't size up, and it's upset me

to that degree that it 's worse than the dying. I can't see 'en there at all. However will a do without me, and him that finicky with his victuals, more than any nurse-cheeld that ever I seed?"

Silphine thought that Jenny's mind was giving way under the stress of change and bewilderment. She tried to turn the old woman's thoughts in another direction,—most unfortunately, as it appeared.

"But perhaps Bill may have grown. He was only six when he died, was n't he?"

"Ay, I 've thought of that, and it do make it all seem stranger and stranger. Lord love 'ee, dear missie, if I could only see it clearer, but I can't, I can't—"

To Silphine's relief a knock at the door broke the stillness. She opened it to admit her uncle.

Parson Cornelius Rosdew's constitution tended to classics as other men's do to gout or rheumatism; from his youth upwards his affinity had been for Greek roots and the minutiæ of classical tense distinctions. It seems probable that he mastered the subtleties of the aorist almost as soon as he left off bottle food, and in the celestial regions themselves the dialect of the angels would have been his first interest. His grip of facts had always been of the slackest, and even in the books which he had handled for a lifetime, he remained a journeyman-mason, working away at the walls without concerning himself with the design of the structure. Stones and mortar, not buildings, words, not meanings, had always been his object; and now the peering habit of

his mind was figured forth aptly enough in the dimness of his physical eyesight. Intense short-sightedness was making him almost blind, and a film seemed to have descended over face and eyes alike. He could occupy himself but little now with his books, but with his daughter Genefer as lieutenant, he still managed to work the parish as curate-in-charge to the rich rector who considered his duty to consist in an occasional sermon and a good deal of Jove-like condescension.

By the curious arrangement of circumstances here below, Mr. Rosdew had dependent on him four women, all more or less incapable of self-support, — his mother, Granny Rosdew, from age; his two nieces and daughter, from the usual lack of professional training. The one proverb really lived up to in an average middle-class life is the peculiarly misleading one concerning the tempering of the wind to the shorn lamb: the more likely a woman is to be exposed to the gales of need, the more shorn — that is, uneducated — she is usually kept.

A sense of the fitness of things, the chief practical sense he possessed, always brought Mr. Rosdew to the sick-beds of his parishioners, though the consolation he brought resided rather in the idea of his sacred office than in any vitality he could himself impart to it. He made his way stumblingly to Jan's room upstairs, while Silphine watched him with bright, pitiful eyes, and Jenny assisted his ascent with candle held high over the well-like stairs from the landing above. Silphine heard her sigh of relief when Mr. Rosdew was safely landed at

the invalid's bedside. To Jenny he was a "high-learnt man, but slack-baked."

Granny Rosdew had long ago concurred in this opinion: he was her last-born; and at the production of this "youngest wren of nine" there had not been energy enough to bring forth aught but a weakling; so the old heathen, his mother, sent him into the Church, considering that the world had no need of such a laggard. But the bed-rock of human nature, the desire for power, crops up everywhere, even in ineptitudes. This desire which drives mankind forward to the conquest of life's secrets like a possession, this desire by which man will some day enter fully into his kingdom, had all his days fled before poor Mr. Rosdew's peering eyes. It is a desire which, especially in the old and weak, takes cruel forms, for since they have never been able to wield real power in their own natures, they instinctively seek it, vampire-like, in the young lives over which the very helplessness of age gives them a leverage. The years are passing, and with them the opportunities for rule, before they go hence into other conditions where a weak soul may be still weak; before this someone shall feel their grip. Mr. Rosdew's pupils were failing him; he had consequently drifted into borrowing from his rich neighbour, Mr. Pentecost, whom he would never have any means of repaying save by a marriage between young Richard Pentecost and Silphine; this arrangement the hard-headed farmer considered would make Mr. Rosdew and himself quits, since it satisfied his

lifelong desire for a marriage between a member of his family and one of the Rosdews. Years before, Granny had refused the farmer himself with expressions of contumely, and this time the old insult should be wiped out. Mr. Rosdew himself knew nothing of this secret motive, but had he done so it would not have affected his action in the least: this marriage was his one escape from the shame of bankruptcy, and minds with few resources against evil cling to the one which presents itself with a persistency impossible to more fertile brains; it is their one ewe lamb.

The visit to Jan was not likely to be a long one, and Silphine stood looking at the dwindling fire that was flickering down like the life in the upper room. She heard above the crackle the feeble voice speaking in answer to her uncle's woolly tones and the cackle of the old woman chiming in from time to time. At last Mr. Rosdew was safely helped down the stairs again, and stood before his niece; it never occurred to him to get himself a chair, and he was far too courtly to think of sitting while she stood. There was a gentle consideration about Mr. Rosdew that had gained him many more well-wishers than had his learning. Having safely seated him, Silphine found that they were alone, for Jenny had gone upstairs again to attend to her husband.

The short locks that encircled Silphine's face made a halo of colour as she stood with her back to the fire; her attitude was tense, and all the force of will at her command was prepared to hurl itself at the white-haired

obstructionist whom she had seated by the hearth. They might have stood for a picture of storm and cloud.

"Uncle Cornelius, why do you want me to marry anyone but John Saxon?" she began; "how can you wish to spoil the happiness of all my life?" "The happiness of all my life" sounds small to a man with only a dim background of greyness to his life; one must have lived deeply to know the real importance of happiness. Mr. Rosdew was therefore comparatively unmoved at his niece's vehemence. Moreover, his mind was full of the queer little fancies that a full-flushed intelligence sweeps away into oblivion from the channel of consciousness; at present he was occupied with the number of stairs to Jenny's staircase and was mentally dividing it by three. He had been known to go back to count the number of panes in a window for this purpose. After a moment, however, the situation dawned on him.

"Marry anyone but John Saxon?" he repeated. "I certainly considered that as the young man was leaving this neighbourhood the connection was over as far as you are concerned. I have also certainly had proposals for you from another quarter,—a much more suitable one, too, since young Mr. Pentecost will be wealthy in our small country way. You must remember, my dear," he went on in less pompous tones, "that I am only a poor country curate, with many helpless ones to provide for. It was a relief to me to hear from the elder Mr. Pentecost that he desired such a match."

"And why are we all so helpless?" demanded Silphine, stretching out protesting arms. "Here are hands only waiting for something to do. Why are we helpless? But I know; you need n't answer. We have never learnt to do anything that people will pay us for doing; but I 'd rather go as a dairy-maid than marry that man. I can milk, anyway, and they do pay for that." The impulse to make someone suffer, that forms the joy of temper, possessed Silphine for the moment, though to turn on Uncle Cornelius was like kicking a small boy.

"The Rosdew girls have always married," he said feebly.

"Well, and we're all paired off already like the animals in the Ark. There's Rosemary and Nix, and Genefer and Isaac Poppy, and John and I," said she, ticking them off with her fingers and making a final sweep with the last words; "and all paired wrong, according to you."

Mr. Rosdew took refuge in platitudes, after the manner of harassed elders.

"Young people seldom or ever know what is best for them; but I do not yet understand how you came to know about Mr. Pentecost's proposals."

"Oh, Gran knew, and she always tells me everything," said Silphine, airily; "she knows why Mr. Pentecost wants it. He always wanted a marriage with the Rosdews. She calls that a big desire; and being brainier than most women she says she knows what a big desire means. Other women are satisfied with tiddlewinks of

satisfaction. She calls a marriage with the Rosdews a big thing," commented Silphine, with nose in air; "I should n't. We 're run to seed; that is, to girls. Gran says that when a family is on the down-grade it always runs to girls."

"And I particularly asked her not to mention the matter," complained Mr. Rosdew.

"And I particularly asked her to tell me. There, I did n't mean to be rude; but how can you expect me to give up John and all that he 's going to make me?"

This was above Uncle Cornelius, who chiefly remembered the episode of Mrs. Cornelius as having resulted in his daughter, not because he had any recollection of Eden days.

"You must understand that you owe something to me," he said more firmly; "all your rearing has been due to me. Where would you be now but for it? It will lift a heavy load from my shoulders, a heavier load than you can well realise, if you agree to listen to this and give up what is only a girl's fancy. John Saxon is poor and a thorough dreamer, as far as I can make him out, and certainly in no position to support a wife. Remember, too, my dear, that a sweet savour rises from sacrifice."

Mr. Rosdew always lived on a higher plane on Sundays, partly because of the clean linen of the first day of the week, for to him, as to a small girl in a clean frock, the possibility of human perfection seemed nearer attainment in fine linen: this was a Saturday night, and he was at his lowest ebb of moral courage, and therefore

not above appealing to the weakness of the logical faculty in woman.

"And the savour from a silly sacrifice is as nasty as the smell from a rotten potato-field," said Silphine, sharply; she was not Granny Rosdew's favourite niece for nothing. "You want to treat all women as Daddy Veale treats his pig: he trots it out for a little walk on a Sunday, or when he 's left work, and then shuts it up tightly again. You give us a little run, and then you want to shut us up in a sty again. Why should n't the pig run about the fields; and why should we girls have to run just where you like?"

"Pigs are not active animals, my dear, nor are girls very independent as a general rule."

"Perhaps not; but you want to make us worse. Anyhow, we Rosdew women don't plaster our hair down on each side of our foreheads and look resigned. We fight; and as for the spirit of us, you cannot tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth, so is every woman that is born a Rosdew."

"You have lived too long with your grandmother, whose tongue has always run away with her, and who chooses to discuss unsuitable subjects in a manner very far from reverent, very far indeed."

"Yes, Gran says that when people can't see their way into a subject, they just stick up, 'No Thoroughfare, by order of Providence.' She is n't like that."

Mr. Rosdew sighed wearily and sat tapping his hands

on his knees. To his relief a brisk step was heard coming up the path outside, and with the clean-cut agility that characterised her, Genefer presently entered the room.

Her long, thin frame, almost achieving length without breadth, carried a well-set tiny head, finished with a wild maze of fringe in which she loved to set a glittering paste star. Large, keen grey eyes redeemed the face from commonness, especially when the features were in repose; for when she laughed, her long, prominent teeth gave an expression of hungry eagerness never seen on the faces of people whose nerves are always somnolent, or whose lot is well padded with ease.

"Come, dad," she said, nimbly picking up his coat; "I don't see that there 's any call for you to stay longer. You can't do any good now."

Mr. Rosdew meekly obeyed her suggestion, and Genefer helped him into his coat, talking briskly all the while to Jenny, who now stood at the bottom of the stairs.

"You must have someone to sit up with you tonight," said Genefer; "shall I knock up Ann Tall and send her in?"

"Well, her 's worse than a drumble-drone for gab; but I 'd sooner have her than Selina Ann, the bastely toad. He 's a wisht atomy now, and I can lift 'en vitty myself."

Then she added in a faltering tone to Mr. Rosdew,

appealing to him as the only male present, "He 'll not be long now, will 'ee, maister?"

"I 'm afraid he won't last till to-morrow, Jenny."

There was a flicker across the old face; she stooped and seized the tongs and began pushing the chain of the crock along till it stood right over the burning logs.

"Then," she said quietly, "I 'd best get the ham on 'gainst the day."

The door closed on Mr. Rosdew and Genefer, while Silphine turned to put more fuel on the fire.

"However can you think about boiling hams now?" she asked wonderingly.

"Augh, dearie, I would n't have nort go wrong now to funeral for all the queen's gold. Why, 't is the last I can do for 'en. And now do 'ee come and see 'en. He is n't bad to look at," she added hastily, seeing a flicker of hesitation pass over Silphine's face; "I would n't ask 'ee to look upon 'en if 't would make ee' feel all-overish."

"Why, no, Jenny, I 'd never be afraid of old friend Jan," said the girl, lifting the candle from the mantelpiece; "come, let us go up."

He was, indeed, "a wisht atomy;" the nightcap seemed to swallow up his peaked face like an extinguisher.

"Well, Jan," said Silphine, putting her hand on his as it lay out on the patched counterpane faded from many washings, "so you 've seen uncle, and now I 've come to see you."

"Iss, Doc 's not a bad chap," said Jan, mixing up his

visitors; "but he's not up to Dr. Budd. Why, missie, he'd look at a chap out of the corner of one eye and tell 'ee what was the ail. If he knocked 'ee downstairs, you was the better for it."

The cult of this famous West Country doctor seems likely to be handed down to children's children, until in the fulness of time he shall be proved to be a sun myth.

"Why, there, now, Jan, you old vaggabone," said Jenny, "'t was missie's uncle you saw last."

"Iss, iss; but I can mind when Dr. Budd cured a Vites-dance by saying to a maid,—'There, come kiss me quick.' Mortal ugly, he was, was Budd, but I'm that sleepy I can't mind any more old, ancient tales for 'ee, missie."

Then Silphine said good-bye, and they left him asleep again. If he stirred, they could hear him from the room below; besides, the ham was greatly exercising Jenny's mind, for the crock was too small for it, and the water left it uncovered if fresh supplies were not constantly poured in.

Silphine was loth to leave the old woman alone, so they resumed their old positions. The presence of the boiling ham made the scene less hushed than it had been on Silphine's entrance.

"Jenny," she said after a while, "what sort is young Dick Pentecost?"

"What sort?" sniffed Jenny; "he's an angle-eared young toad."

Silphine had grown accustomed to Jenny's idioms, and knew that "angle-eared" meant mischievous, with pointed ears, like Puck.

"Casting sheep's eyes at 'ee, has he now?" asked Jenny.

"Why," said Silphine, "I never said so."

"Well," answered Jenny, taking this answer to be affirmative, "and I've seen 'en many the time arming a maid down riverside. For all he's pretty well up in the world, I would n't trust 'en; he's got a bad name."

"Why, Jenny, you're getting silly about the maids."

"I've seen a deal, and I say that when there's lads like that Dick Pentecost about, you'd best keep maids shut up in pantry. Cut down your woods, too, say I. A turnpike road's safest for keeping company in. I'd thwack 'em and wack 'em till I made 'em skip like an angle-twitch [blindworm], if I had my way."

"Why, I never knew you could be so fierce," said Silphine, with a much-relieved mind; she had now a good reason for refusing young Pentecost.

"Ah, dearie, wait till you've seen what I have, and then you'll be just as fierce. And I'd never have anything to say to that Dick Pentecost, if I was you."

"I never will," answered Silphine, with conviction. It is a sign of advancing age when one begins to settle things with reference to someone else's convenience besides one's own; in this matter, at any rate, some of us never grow old. "Besides, I'm already settled," she

went on; "we all are, and I don't believe uncle takes it in at all."

"Ay, a 's all out with young maids and their fancy men, and there a goes, slippety-slop, flippety-flop, and never knows that Rosemary 's down quay way arm in crook with that Nix — and a rolling eye too, she have; her Gran over again, she is, I 'll warn."

Granny Rosdew was the Wife of Bath of Widdicombe, having been thrice married, besides other company in youth.

"But Genefer and Rosemary," protested Silphine, "are able to take care of themselves; and, besides, Nix is only a rattle."

"Rattlesnake, I 'll go bail; but young maids know nort of the nature that the Almighty 's put in them, for why the dear Lord himself only knows; and your uncle 's like the rest, — never thinks any harm can come to his own. He 's quality; that 's the notion."

Jenny's class pride was up in arms.

"Whatever mysteries have you got in your dear old head?" asked Silphine.

"It is n't mysteries in my head; it 's an aller [boil] in my niddick [neck] that I 've got," said Jenny, who considered mysteries a form of disease.

"But tell me what you are thinking about," persisted Silphine; "it 's something serious, or you would n't have thought about it now. Do tell me, there 's a dear old woman."

"I 'll allow that, mebbe, it 's all plain and straight with

that old Isaac Poppy and Genefer; he's good enough for her, for her's not pigs for everybody's market. But when there's a man of any sort about, it's like fired hay: you never can tell when it'll blaze out."

"Tell me what you fear," said Silphine.

"Well, now, see here. When I was a little cheeld, my old mother — she was n't old then, though — took me in to see a poor maid. You see, like the very little cheeld that I was, I could n't make out why the baby was a-lying by her, and so I asked. Mother she says, 'When a maid's been very, very naughty, God sends a little baby to make her good.' I've never lost that in mind. 'T is most the first thing I can mind her saying, and it's a true saying and worthy to be believed; but the going through with it cuts 'em up sore, and I'm allays minded to stop the poor maid afore it comes to that pass."

There was a silence, but subjects that touch the quick of life are apt to follow close on the heels of one another.

"Jenny," said Silphine, "you know what it says about the righteous and his seed not begging their bread. Don't you think that'll be true of Uncle Cornelius? He could n't be brought down so very low, could he?"

"Iss, fay, I've thought upon that tex many the time, but I reckon in they warm lands that David knew about 't was easier to scrat up a living than 't is here, what with the cold winters and the bad illnesses."

"Jenny, you're managing all right, are n't you? None of us could bear to think of your being in want."

"Bless you, my dear, I know that."

"There can't be much for you to take pleasure in, now that Jan is going."

"Eh, I'll never go into the House, and I won't be carried up churchyard way by the parish; I've got that to think upon. Then, there's my bit of dinner and my lace-work to see to,—that'll pass the time along. There's my 'Nuity of £12, and the rent's allays ready for Lawyer Juliff, come when he may for it."

Jenny thought it quite in keeping with the character of landlords in general to be always dropping in with casual demands for money.

"Ay," she went on, "I've never been behind yet, not through all Jan's illnesses, and that with butter often at one and six."

"Jenny, you don't find any difficulty in selling your lace, do you? I can do it nearly as well as you. Could n't I make some money that way? We're going to be very poor: the Rosdews are on the down-hill path."

"Eh, yes, I can allays sell it. But you must n't demean yourself to it, and I can only do coarse kinds now for my eyes, kinds that I could do blindfold a'most."

"I shall get out my pillow at once. Honiton is going to be worn again now. Jenny, you're an angel."

She was, if self-denial can make one. As a matter of fact, Jenny knew that she could never get more than a certain amount taken; and if Silphine's went with hers,

some of her own would have to be kept back. But Jenny was as full of loyalty to the family she had served as any Caleb Balderstone; the elasticity of the annuity must be increased somehow.

But here Ann Tall's pattened feet came clop-clop up the path.

"Laws-a-me!" said she, at the sight of Silphine, "whatever will Granny Rosdew be doing this time of night without 'ee?"

"I did n't know it was so late," said Silphine, as Jenny disappeared upstairs, "but I could n't leave Jenny all alone."

"Augh, poor sawl, and he going fast, too. I can mind 'en slipping along when pond was all of a clitch of ice, and not so long back-along either. Night to 'ee, missie."

The ham was the chief dish at the funeral a few days later, and Jenny spent long hours wondering whether Jan was rambling and scrambling in the Fields of the Blest, free at last from rheumatics, in the search for little Bill; it was a wonder that abode with her till she too joined in the ramble.

Chapter III

The Feast of Pomona

THE countryman's calendar of earthly joys passes from dog-rose time through the blackberry months to the period of the fertilisation of the fruit-trees. This coming period of apple-bearing Farmer Robert Pentecost always heralded by an ancient ceremony handed down in orchard districts from long-past days when trees played a large part in the religious and judicial side of life, — long-past days in which, to a fanciful mind, the arboreal instincts of a much more primitive race were not entirely forgotten. In Northern countries, possibly with a wiser philosophy, they celebrated the hope, rather than the accomplishment, of the fruit harvest, just as in summer lands they store up the wine and celebrate the vintage feast as the triumph of the year's strife.

It was the night of the last hoar-frost of the season when the day of Mr. Pentecost's party arrived, and a bright moonlight softened the outlines of faces and limbs, as the cloaked and hooded figures of the guests arrived at the farm gates, bringing out weirdness where there had been ugliness, and grotesquerie where there had been commonplaceness, — greatest triumph of art.

The cold glory of a dead world gave a dignity that only the vivid flame of the red fire of life would take away.

As a challenge to the celestial illumination a great bonfire had been lit just outside the long kitchen, which they had cleared for the dancing. The room, which ran the whole length of the house at the back, looked out on the river-banks shelving roundly downwards and heavily laden near the house with corn-stacks and below these with a dense tracery of apple-trees, all bare of leaves, but with each bearing a horn lantern that was to be lit later on. The crackle of the logs in the open-air fire and the hoarse murmur of the swollen river below were the only sounds to be heard in the intervals of the jigs and polkas from within, which swelled out suddenly and as suddenly ceased again with the opening and shutting of the back door. Several times the music so swelled and ceased, till a group of dark figures had gathered round the fire, piling it up with fresh logs. Though the night was keen, the four men who had been tending the heap took to watching the dancers as they whirled by the uncurtained windows in the light of clusters of candles, twinkling back in answer to the lusty light of the fire without. Soon the lights within grew into blue, gold-tipped circles as the many feet caused the dust to rise and the heat gathered in a film on the panes. Suddenly someone threw up a window, and the watchers could see more clearly. The beat of feet on the boarded floor and the clatter of voices reached them clearly. Sir Roger was the dance in hand, and

young Pentecost was lifting Silphine off her feet as he whirled her round. The host himself stood watching from the fireplace with a critical smile which he meant to be a benevolent one.

"Cross over, Jonathan, figure in Jemima.

"Up again, my dicky birds; I wish the room were wider," he chirruped, as his son danced out to meet his partner.

Mr. Pentecost's arm was slightly palsied, and his outstretched claw was commonly used for the purpose of denouncing Widdicombe as a "little Sodom" on which might be expected to fall the fate of the cities of the plain; it was not an encouraging movement, and to have it directed towards her made Silphine feel distinctly uncanny.

Like the workfolk outside, the farmer was especially bent on watching his young hopeful. It was a night to him full of the sense of social elevation, for all the curate's young folk were present, as well as Mr. Nix Calmady, who ranked among the quality, being the son of a squire "in a small way."

"In rare fettle young maister be to-night," said Edwin Lark, as he gave the bonfire a poke.

"Iss, that a be," answered an older man; "looks like a courting job, that do," with a jerk of his thumb in the direction of the receding couple.

"Well, I don't say it may n't," said Lark, being reluctant to adopt a too committal attitude.

"And a courting job with a Pentecost do mean a

courting job, and no mistake," put in a third man, leaning forward to get a better view.

"And what do it mean in general, Thomas Matterface? A burying job? But, there, you must allays have your joke, or there 's no biding of 'ee."

"Well, 't is deeds, not words, with they Pentecosts. Mind 'em, I can, man and boy; and they 'm hard, and their fathers was afore 'em. 'T is a word and then a blow with 'em. I mind my mother saying her 'd ruther be a light o' love than a wedded wife to a Pentecost, and by all I can make out, her was in the right of it."

"Well," said the fourth man, who had been following the words of the last speaker with the air of one cogitating a mystery, "they 'm called 'Pentecost,' then, not rightly, but contrairy-wise, as you mid say."

"I 'm gallied if I can rightly cast up your words, Nat Prettijohn; 't is too deep for the likes of I."

"Why, Pentecost was tongues, war n't it? Not deeds; and, according to your telling, they be all deeds and no tongues."

"'T is a deep old file," said the chorus; while Nat wore the air of one whose merits were only duly recognised.

"A rare pretty spirit the maid has, too," said Lark, as the couples went off; "look, how a tosses 'en a glimpse, same as you 'd throw a dog a bone. Sniff! and my lady 's turned her back on 'en. Lord, it 's as good as a play. I like 'em with a bit of sperrit, too."

"Sperrit, saith a, 't is n't much sperrit there 'll be after

a month of Pentecost. The old man about did for old Madam, though a was as make as sweet zider."

"Iss; but there 's many a slip between the kiss and the ring."

"So there be, but you may take your davy, old maister 'll settle it right enough, for a wants a bit of a quality maid for his lad."

"Money, I reckon, that 's what passon 's after. How did old Pen lay hand on it all, the old moneybags?"

"Ay, 't was the rare old war-time that did that. You look to the old Jew nose of him, and then you won't go driving in with such questions, which only show what a fule you be."

"Fule or no, Nat Prettijohn, I would n't give thiccy," with a snap of the fingers, "for your Pentecost, with his deeds and no words. Why, you mid so well say I was called Matterface because of gatherings, and I can't call to mind that none of our family ever had a gathering, without 't was mother, and that only once. You 'm too high-learnt, that 's what you be. Call yourself Prettijohn, do 'ee? A pretty John you be, sure 'nuff."

Edwin Lark recognised that it was time to throw oil on troubled waters. "Here," he cried, "leave badgering alone, and let 's get to the lighting up. Frighten half the old dummuns in parish as 't is, leave alone giving them their deaths of cold, jumping out of bed to see if Prooshians be coming, as they hark to the shots."

The four men dispersed in different directions, and their four separate paths were marked by the starting

points of light that sprang from the lanterns as they passed from tree to tree. The startled birds flew out with a hurried whir of wings, the smaller ones with a sudden "tweet" of alarm. When all the lights had darted out of the gloom, each one a globe of dusty gold in the horn which surrounded it, the younger guests came trooping to the door.

The fire was now rising in great flames, red-tipped above, gold below, and blue round the old wood-chunks which had just been thrown on. One lad caught up a flaming brand from the heap and waved it towards the orchard with a view-halloo. It was winter Carnival time, more Bacchanalian for the frosty spirit that was abroad and for the mistletoe that had been provided. The firelight flashed and the moonlight gleamed on eager faces, shrill cries echoed and wild laughs broke out as the rout was lost amid the apple-boughs. Presently the first shot at a lantern cracked out, followed by shrieks of mock terror and the shouted verse, —

"Here 's to thee, old apple-tree."

It was the baptism of the orchards in fire, to make each tree bear plentifully, less efficacious, if more romantic, than grafting, which the old-fashioned West-Country man appears to resent as an unjustifiable interference with nature.

Soon the shots waxed faster and more wild, lights jerked up and went out, till only a few on the highest trees still remained to be struck by marksmen not too

eager to succeed, while the laughing girls circled round them in the wooded gloom where kisses were easily compassed.

The light flamed on the last couple to disappear in the orchard; it was Rosemary Rosdew and Nix Calmady, who were playing at the only merry war in the human game. Every inflection of Rosemary's voice, with its queer guttural break, every movement of her rounded limbs, every flicker of her black eyelashes, spoke in turn of the old charm that no man can resist and no woman see without a pang at heart, — not always of envy. At this moment womanhood was just on elbow to rise in her, and she made every girl who came near seem harsh and ungainly; the band of velvet on her neck was a decoration queens might have envied. Nix's big frame hung above the little figure that tapped the half-burnt brands with a restless foot; he was bare-headed, and the frosty air just lifted the shaggy mat that framed his close-shaven, lawyer-like face, now almost clouded by the beatific vision vouchsafed him by Rosemary. Genefer, who was watching them from the hearth within, could gladly have slapped the pair of them; she did not approve of beatific visions in public.

At last the two stood together beneath a flickering lantern on an outlying tree far away from the riotous crew whose shouts they could hear in the distance. They stood for a moment listening to the noise passing away in the distance. Suddenly it grew very quiet, even the terrified birds were still, until a breeze rose and stirred

the branches till they creaked again, the lantern swung, the candle flamed, and then went out. The shiver in the air caught Nix, and he held out his arms in the dimness. "I 've never even kissed you," he said brokenly. The storm in himself seemed so great that as he stooped to her face he said tenderly, —

"You 're not afraid, are you?"

Rosemary was often afraid, though not at all of this sort of episode, but the touch of his lips brought into life a strong power in herself of which she had known nothing before; a force leaped up in her to answer his.

"Oh, oh, oh!" said she, pressing her face tightly against his coat.

"God make me a better man; make me worthy of her!" cried Nix, in the old prayer which is woman's sanctification.

Hitherto Rosemary had seemed to him a mocking sort of female Cupid; with answering passion she became a goddess. Nix answered easily to the helm, good allurements and bad caught him quickly, but the good were the more lasting; he had a natural affinity for clean things.

At last he bent forward gropingly in the dusk and cut a notch in the bark of the tree: he wanted to know the place of his happiness again. One wonders how often it might become a place of penitence. Just now he had found his "Seek-no-further" apple, and as of old a grove was the scene of worship.

Mr. Pentecost seldom needed the services of a shah-

bash wallah, — that strange functionary who attends the Indian artisan as the incarnation of applause, with his "Bravo, boys, bravo!" As for me and my house, we will have the best of things in general, from strawberries to wives, because as a house we reach perfection: this was the creed of Mr. Pentecost. It was, moreover, a long-inherited family faith; the cave-dwelling Pentecosts had undoubtedly demanded the driest as of right. This particular Pentecost had only, up to the present, met with two apparent disproofs of his notion. He was, in the first place, the richest man in the village, not excepting the rector, whose reputation for learning made very little difference to Mr. Pentecost, since young Richard had years before preached a sermon modelled on the rectorial manner. Mr. Pentecost had rewarded his son with a shilling for his wit and a whipping for speaking evil of dignitaries, being himself a church official and devout to the point of making his prayers dictation exercises for the Almighty. But twice he had been foiled by women, and after a lifelong experience of "downing" men, it still baffled his slow brain to explain these failures of his. He had, in fact, been perpetually hagridden since, in a fit of wrath at Selina Rosdew's contemptuous rejection of him, he had taken to be the mother of his son a woman whose flaccid nature, like that of the slimy marsh-stalkers of Norse legend, jelly-like and formless, baffled every blow. Being shapeless, she merely flowed into another mould every time he attacked her, till she became, at bed and board,

a shapeless aggregation of annoyance. The very mole on her face was an aggravation; in the New Jerusalem Mr. Pentecost would scarcely forget the morning after their marriage, when he first noted the sheer worry of that mark in the middle of the left cheek. Neither of them had ever heard of electrolysis, even if it existed in their day; and that mole remained till her death—and beyond—a symbol of irritation, even to nail-gnawing. When she lay in her coffin, he readjusted the handkerchief round her head in order to hide it.

But she had left behind her a worse memento than the memory of a mole; namely, a son who seemed a throwback to the marital lapse of a former Pentecost who, apparently a victim to the liberal notions of post-revolution times, had married a gipsy. Apparently also his liberal ideas ended with the marriage, for the gipsy wife had stabbed her husband for refusing to allow her to attend a fair. Tradition said that the deed was committed in the very kitchen where to-night Mr. Pentecost strode up and down, watching the work-people who had been admitted to a reversion of the feast when the bettermost folks were gone. As he tramped up and down, playing a minor Providence to these men, he was applying a salve to his soul for certain humiliations of the evening.

"Iss," said one, his cheek bulging with pigeon-pie; "maister's the last to keep up the good old customs."

"What was good enough for my fathers is good enough for me," said Mr. Pentecost, rubbing the domed surface of his narrow bald head and feeling the sentiment

as soothing as the friction. A Pentecost demanded no new and startling truths; they had always shouted hoary maxims at election times, and felt themselves to be benefactors of the human race by doing so.

"I 'm all for the old, ancient ways, I be," said another, "the harvest home and everything proper."

"Hee, hee," laughed an old man from the corner seat, as with sharp chin and hooked nose he bent crescent-wise towards his knees; "you can't call to mind a harvest song as I 've heard in a Methody chapel. An old gammer had lost her chicken from rats, and so had come in small when the money-box was going round."

The old man mouthed out the syllables; it was his hour of triumph when he had a story to tell. "These be the words," said he, struggling with the difficulties of pronunciation caused by toothless jaws, —

> "Come, all ye cats that have got claws,
> Oh, catch these rats between your jaws,
> That have devoured this old woman's chicken,
> From which they got such a glorious picking."

"You see, folks, it 's the loss of the money, that 's what touched 'em up to they heights, more 'n what you 'd look for from a Methody and a Primitive at that. And now I must be going home-along, but not afore us have drunk to the very good health of young maister and the missus that is to be. I reckon I don't spake without book."

The farmer had a keen sense of the possible laughter of the village at any failure in his marriage schemes; if

it had been an affair of buying and selling, he would have been loud-voiced in anticipatory crowing.

"I don't know," he said, "that I've ever given my neighbours cause to gossip over any idees of mine. I'm not one to count my chickens before they are hatched."

The meeting broke up hurriedly; there was a loud scraping of pushed-back chairs, much wiping of beery lips against hairy hands, and a chanted chorus of "No offence."

Mr. Pentecost regarded the disorderly table in disgust, as he awaited the return of his son from seeing Silphine home. To-night had decided him that young Richard was a "paddy-faced young oaf," spiritless in good company, sulky at home, and only famed as a tamer of beasts, since the day when as a lad he had backed the fierce old ram Bismarck. Mr. Pentecost recalled bitterly the Sunday morning when he had inspected the three Rosdew girls, in their summer bravery, to see which would suit his son best; he remembered how he had rejected Genefer as bony, and Rosemary as light, and had been driven perforce to put up with Silphine as more like her grandmother than the others. But the boy did not match any of them; even the farmer's stupidity recognised that they were each too good for him. And the Pentecosts had always enjoyed everything at its best, by the blessing of Heaven and their own merits. But like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, like the thoughts of cool water in a burning

desert, came the vision of those bills of sale which he held over Mr. Rosdew.

After half-an-hour's brooding, young Richard lounged into the room, and sank into the elbow chair opposite to his father.

"Well?" asked Mr. Pentecost, his heart beating heavily.

"She won't have me."

"Get out of my sight, you — whelp!" said Mr. Pentecost. His thumbs were slowly rubbing themselves round and round the palms of his hands, in the effort after self-control. It was a movement he had often made in the past; a man's opposition made him clench his fists, but he could not feel his son to be a man. It was like a knife-edge drawn across the back of a scarred and lacerated hand, to see young Richard get up and slouch obediently out of the room; the boy was a coward — and the son of his loins.

It was like passing from the whirling heart of storm into some mountain-deep cave to come into Granny Rosdew's bedroom, after the worship of the earth-fruit, where more than the ruddiness of glowing fire-logs had crackled in the frosty stillness which fanned the flame of wood and flesh into life.

The houses where the old await the great change are all shut in, however many windows may be opened to the wild winds of morning. Silphine often fancied that the tiny everyday habit, never varied without pain, was just a rest before the great wander-power, when, freed from the physical, there should be given to the soul the

speed of thought; when, instead of an eight-roomed house, there should be given the universe for a dwelling-place. The girl had sometimes speculated thus, for she enjoyed the strange blessing of having lived with old folks who had not "despaired of" life, but who laid hold on it more as the years passed.

Granny was sitting up in bed as her grand-daughter entered, and her cap-shadow against the wall nodded in time to her emphatic speech; the network of wrinkles seemed to spring into an independent life of their own with her smile; the hooked nose, beak-like, had certainly a greater mobility than most noses; the fallen lips could whip out a truculent retort as trenchantly as ever. The power of the woman spoke more keenly in age than in youth; the only change seemed disintegration, and every feature was less under central control than of old. In accord with her nature, Granny had laid aside flesh when matrons put theirs on, and stronger grew the grip of the will as the flesh dwindled; now a skinny membrane covered a few bones. The outline of her shrunken breast distressed her far more than the sinking eyeballs and the fallen lips; Gran had lived most fully in the power of sex and its attributes. She had scarcely ever been ill. "Keep your mind going, and you won't have a faddling, peaky body," quoth she; "I 'm too much alive inside to be ill outside."

Once only the life-grip seemed to have left her, and the doctor declared it would be a matter of a few days; but she read his mind and her own, for, finding herself

plucking the bedclothes, she suddenly put the curb on herself. "I don't die so easily, and I 'll give him the lie yet," she said. So the sheets ceased to be plucked, and Gran arose once more; she could not die till she had wrung the last drop of life out of this one udder of the great life-mother.

"You 've got a look of me about you to-night," she said, clasping her knees under the sheets and looking like a white heron ready for flight. This was the greatest compliment she could conceive.

"Adam there?" she asked. Adam was her name for John Saxon, whose latter-day wisdom afforded her great joy.

"Why, no, Gran, I knew he was n't coming," said Silphine, with a spring to the foot of the high bed, where she sat dangling a foot and passing a hand caressingly over the firm outline of her neck and chest; the thrill of the power of these things filled her just now from head to foot, and the shadow on the wall seemed to leer as the passing and the coming generations threw them on the screen. They made Gran think of the grass which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the fire; so swiftly passing the power of woman's empire. But she lives again in another, and so wrings a triumph from the spectre of decay.

"Ay, that 's a pity," she said, nodding till the shadows shook again; "that 's a pity. You 'd have held him between your little thumb and finger to-night."

"Why to-night?" asked Silphine, innocently; she knew, but it sounded so pleasant to hear it over again.

Gran's wrinkles waved into long lines like a wheat-field under flying scuds of wind.

"There's just you and the other men," she said succinctly; too many sweets are bad for the young, and she was not going to over-feed the child. She knew the quick-thronging fancies in the girl's brain as clearly as if she had been reading them from a printed page. "He's never seen you," she went on, "never; only the nice little babies you're going to bring him."

John had elaborated some of his views.

"He'll be something like a man if he ever stops looking into the middle of next week. You've never put the power on him yet."

"Why should I want to?"

"Little fool, it's your only chance of power here below. Don't you know your A. B. C. yet? I've had three husbands, and many and many a sweetheart, and that's the only bit of power I ever tasted."

Gran expressed grip, if ever a human soul did.

"Didn't you ever love any of them?" Silphine's voice dropped at the word over which girls throw a glamour.

"Eh, I don't know; I might have my third. He was a masterful one, and I liked him the best as he lay in his black box, but then he'd given me children, and that's the other bit of power that's given to a woman. Why, child," she went on, — the shadow became sibyl-like, — "I wanted, like all live folks, to do, and hold, and rule, and the men took it all. 'Business,' said they, 'I

did n't know anything about money,' — and that very man lost me every penny. Why, there 's that poor tool, your uncle, that never thought a straight thought in his life, he 'll get up pulpit-stairs and tell us all what life is; the youngest boy 'll do it. And what do they know, that have n't felt the living child leap in their side? Ay, there 's our power: what 's to come is ours, and those we bore forget it, forget the thoughts they got from our brains, the shiver of life we gave 'em. Eh, child, pay them out. Make John Saxon crawl, or you 're no child of mine."

"But, Gran, he thinks what you do."

"And settles your life as I would the trimmings of your dress. It 's your life, not his, and I 'd let him know it. But you 've got me in you somewhere, and it 'll grip you sometime, before you 're under the daisies. Have you downed Richard Pentecost?"

Silphine slowly slipped off the bed and stretched herself: Gran's talk shocked her; youth's love of pretty-pretty only yields to a good sharp agony.

"I 've refused to marry young Mr. Pentecost, as I told uncle I should," she answered with dignity.

"Oh, the young one, it does n't matter about him; it 's the old man that will feel it. Twice done by a Rosdew;" she looked an old crone as she "nickered" low to herself.

"Gran, is n't it contemptible to feel like that year after year, to keep up such an old grudge?"

"And get your knife in at last," rapped Gran, with

decision. "Eh, dear," she said, turning over on her side, "they neither marry nor are given in marriage where I 'm going. Then I reckon there 'll be some other power, and it won't be one way for a woman and a dozen ways for a man to get the grip on. But there won't be men and women, perhaps, or they 'll be so much alike you can't tell t' other from which. That 'll be a blessing, maybe."

But she half regretted it; the old weapon of sex came so handily to the grasp, she knew every trick of that sword-blade, every turn of the handle. It would be ill using new weapons.

Chapter IV

Paradise Place

WIDDICOMBE lay within the Celtic border well known to doctors; within this live the touch-and-go folks who only need the force of a fly's impact to send them whirling into the depths of delusion, or of great achievement. Within this border, in the dreamy valleys, the maids grow, cactus-like, to a passionate life that Northern women call voluptuous, not unfairly; appropriately enough, the cactus is the most valued house-plant of these farms and cottages. In the older people enough varieties of crabbed eccentricity are found to fill a good-sized "retreat" for neurotics. Supernaturalism and sex, devil-hunts and nympholepsy, — these form the chief outlets of the fierce emotionalism of the race; native folk-songs and hymns echo these two tones almost exclusively, catching nothing of the breath of the sea-wind that produced, amidst lust and greed and bombast, a race of heroes whose daring was genius. The finest antiseptic to the lush humanity of these lands is that same savour of pitch and tar which, blowing across the myrtle-scents, created the sea-dog.

Now that he had retired from the practice of the law, old Mr. Juliff spent his time seeing visions and dreaming dreams. Indeed, he knew so much about the spirit-world and disliked its inhabitants so heartily that he never went in a boat for fear of its capsizing, or in a carriage for fear of the horse bolting, lest by either means he should incontinently be sent to join those beings who so persistently came back from the shades to haunt him. Though he dwelt in "Paradise Place," the Eden glory had long ago departed from the house; Lucifer, however, remained, for, according to his own account, Mr. Juliff was on speaking terms with the principle of evil. This was well known in the village, and fanciful children saw the atmosphere of the "pit" hovering in visible shape over the roof of the little house. Notwithstanding this sinister reputation, the garden, which looked south, was packed with roses in summer-time, and, being sheltered by a side-wing from the east, was the cosiest nook in Widdicombe. The entrance was from a tiny lane which led ultimately into the churchyard; the visitor to Paradise Place, according to an old droll of the lawyer's, got to Paradise before he "went down along churchyard way." It was a pleasing circumstance peculiar to this happy valley. A gate, at the top of a little flight of steps, precipitated the unwary visitor downwards into the midst of the roses. The noise of the scramble was very convenient to Mr. Juliff, because, as he sat in the room which the visitor must pass in order to get to the front door, he was always ready to

receive them by the time they had recovered their breath. Through the creepers round the window he could see the visitor's profile; that was also convenient, for Lawyer Juliff, like old King Cole, frequently called for his pipe and his glass, and thus knew whether he must pop these convivial assistants into the cupboard.

Two days after the Pentecost party, Tobe Tucker, the carrier, was delivering parcels at the door of Paradise Place; Mr. Juliff was listening to his remarks, and so never heard the scramble of a second visitor.

"Iss," said Tobe; "that beatises bread do weigh on the mind more than tongue can tell. Times upon times I have woke in a cold sweat, feeling that the beatis bread must a bin left behind."

Mr. Juliff was obliged to eat bread prepared for diabetic patients, and Tobe was employed to fetch it. The old lawyer got gropingly to his feet when Silphine, Tobe being at last disposed of, entered the room. His venerable white hair and great white mustachios contrasted well with the salmon tint of the rest of his face, and the whole was set off by the silk handkerchief which he had thrown over his head to promote slumber. He spoke in a metallic voice which few children could understand and which had done much to gain for him a diabolic reputation. Black eyebrows, fiercely hairy, bristled over his black, excitable eyes.

"Heigh, heigh, missie," said he; "now this is neighbourly of you, to come to see an old man, now that he's all by his lone again."

"Uncle Rosdew said I was to come," said Silphine, seating herself on a corner of the bedraped couch in the manner of one who is but a pilgrim and a stranger.

"Very foolish of Uncle Rosdew to talk like that," said Mr. Juliff to himself; "set the girl's back up, that will.—And so young Pentecost has gone a-wooing," he said after an oppressive pause; "I saw him going up street t'other day looking pretty buckish. Ah, you women, you women, 't is like the Bible Christians with you all. 'I 've got a man, I 've got a man, I 've got a mansion in the skies,' as they used to sing."

"So uncle has been talking me over with you."

"No, no, no; he just called in to pass the time of day and to get my congratulations."

"Rather early for that, as I don't mean to have him at any price."

"Maid's fancies, maid's fancies."

Silphine's temper was rising, but the heat of the room and the look in his wicked old eyes seemed to hypnotise her; she allowed the old man to ramble on.

"Pretty tough things they are, as Uncle Rosdew will find," she said quietly.

"Ah, I suppose you've another young spark in your mind's eye; but it will be all one ten years hence whether you marry t'other or which."

"Perhaps so; but at any rate it 's not fit that I should marry young Pen, and I won't."

"You just listen to me. When I was a young sprig, a rollicking young devil at that, too, I would have licked

the dust off my Sara's feet. She was n't exactly the first, but that's neither here nor there. Well, I married Sara, and for twenty years I rued the day. Why, if I was a bit late in coming in, 't was hysterics the livelong night, and as for the servants — there was n't a servant that would speak a civil word to me. She'd turned 'em all against me to that degree that I dare n't ring the bell but what a maid came in to see if I was bent on murder. Ah, Sara, Sara! she was a thorn in my side."

He looked pensively at the fire.

"I don't see that this has anything to do with me."

"But I say that it has. Does n't it prove that if you marry to please yourself, you may repent at your leisure?"

"I should say that if it proved anything it was that you 'd better not marry at all."

"La, la, there you go. Why, where would the world be then? But to return to Sara, there was a deeper and darker depth than ever I guessed."

Here his voice sank, and he looked round at the corner by his right elbow. "I saw the devil at her elbow, — yes, at her elbow, — in the form of a handsome man, and at the words, 'Get thee behind me, Satan,' he vanished."

The old man kept his right hand outstretched and leant forward to peer into Silphine's face. The girl laughed; he had got on to the subject of his craze and was merely amusing.

"Ah, you may laugh, you may laugh, but it is n't over yet. I can't, I dare n't, walk in the garden at dusk.

It's, 'Joshua, Joshua,' loud and screaming, or worse, it's, 'Josh, Josh,' soft and gentle — and she's been in her grave over fifteen years. She said she'd haunt me, and she does."

He wiped the beads of perspiration from his forehead. "But," he went on, excitedly jumping up and rummaging among the papers in the corner cupboard, "I'll be even with her yet. She sha'n't get the better of me when I'm in my grave."

His hand was shaking so that he could scarcely hold the sheet of foolscap, which he put on the table by his side. Still trembling, while Silphine watched him with a fascinated gaze, he put on his spectacles and seized the paper once more.

"This," he said, "is what I mean to have cut on my tombstone, to show the world that I was master at the last. If anybody is in doubt on that point, let him look it up on the tombstone. That'll prove; that'll prove. What do you think of this, missie?" he said, pursing out his lips as he read. "First," he interpolated, "of course, there'll come the name; then, in deep letters, mind, so as to allow for weathering, — 'The enemy encompassed me round about. She digged a pit and laid a snare for my feet, but my soul escaped out of the hand of the fowler. Yea, verily, she prevailed not against me.' 'She' occurs twice, you perceive, and I shall see to it that the letters are cut very deep." Whether after death or before seemed immaterial. "Now, how does that strike you? very convincing, I should say."

"Very much so."

"Ah, I thought you'd say so," he said in a complacent tone, replacing the paper in the cupboard.

"Now," he went on in his business manner, "you 'll think over what I said: marry to please yourself, and you 'll be likely to repent."

"And marry to please somebody else, and you 'll be sure to," retorted Silphine.

"Well, that is n't bad, but it will never do to act up to it. Now, I tell you frankly, you 'll have to come to it, whether or no."

"And I say I won't."

"And I say you will, just because your uncle will be ruined if you don't," said Mr. Juliff, with a threatening forefinger waving in the air.

"Ruined? How?"

"Bankrupt, if you like the word better."

"But I know that he has been paying his bills; Genefer told me so."

"Ay, but where did he get the money from? That 's the question. Why, my sweet little ladybird, old Pentecost 's nothing but a money-lender; and that 's where the money came from to pay rent, shop-bills, everything."

Silphine was too bewildered to speak.

"And he wants you for his son because old Pen knows it 's a step up for the family, and it 'll give him the opportunity of paying off old scores against your grandmother. That 's the matter in a nutshell."

The four walls of the room seemed closing round Silphine; she got to her feet hurriedly. "Let me go," she whispered.

Out in the open air the lash and sting of the north wind smote her with a friendly buffet. She hurried along the straight road to the open country. The first sensation was of elation: she was at last the centre of a drama in real life, and this flattered her sense of self-importance; it was good to feel so much hanging on her mere yea or nay. Then some chance words she had read somewhere began to sing in her ears: "Bought and sold in the markets of the world! Bought and sold in the markets of the world!" She repeated the sentence over and over again, to heighten her own feeling of tragedy; it was more than half enjoyable.

But soon thought faded and casual sense-perceptions took the place of it. In the distance a larch wood stood out against the sky-line of blue-grey cloud; the summits of the wintry trees were tinged with gold. The colour and the feathery outline pleased her. Her senses rested on the woodland beauty, and when the gold light faded into russet, and then into fawn, her mind dwelt on the changes like a child's. Entering the wood, she trod a faintly marked path in it. The damp, sweet stillness reached other senses. Here and there the clumps of brown oak leaves through the gloom looked like friendly faces. Down the path she went; another figure followed her, and had done so all the way from the village. After Silphine had stood for a moment, she suddenly

turned and her gaze fell on the intruder. It was Genefer, who, as Silphine shrank away with a start, seized her shoulders and pushed her down on the yellow, lichened boulder that loomed out against the grey-greens like a flaring poster in a drab street.

"Stop!" said Genefer; "I saw you in the street, and I followed you. I did it on purpose."

"I wish you had left me alone."

"That's just what I don't mean to do. Stop," she cried, putting out a hand as she stood in front of Silphine, "stop! you know it all, and I know it all. We'll have no lies, and you've got to hear what I'm going to say."

"But it is n't any use our speaking of it, and we can't talk of it, — you and I, Genefer."

"But I tell you we can. You're thinking of dad, and that I'm dad's daughter." Even doughty Genefer was gulping out the words here. "Well, dad's done many foolish things since he first saw daylight; but there's one thing he's done that was not foolish, and that was in having me for a daughter."

Genefer's pride in herself was bringing back her old, ready, snappish style; self-confidence is the most warming and invigorating virtue in existence.

"You can't help here, Genefer, though you are the readiest person in the family."

"Yes, I can; I can keep his hands clean."

"What do you mean?"

"See here," said Genefer, grasping her cousin's right

shoulder and shaking it, "what are you going to do? Quick, drive on, do!" she said, seeing that Silphine was hesitating.

"I don't know."

"Then I do. Never, never, never, give in. Let dad be ruined, and let old Pen raise hell if he likes, but never, never, say yes to his son."

"But, Genefer, we, you all will be ruined."

"And dad's hands will be clean. Don't you see?" she pleaded. "See, he's never done a thing like this before, never a shady thing before — and he sha'n't now. I won't let him."

"But —"

"Yes, I know, he means it all the same, whether you give in or not. But, you know, we're both greater and smaller in meaning than in what we do. It's acts, not meanings, that tot up in the big book above."

"Oh, Genefer, and I always hated you."

"It isn't for you that I'm doing it. Don't let that run in your silly little head. It's all for dad; he's been my child as long as I can remember."

"I'll do what you say."

"Mind, they'll all pound you and pound you, except Gran, but if you feel like caving in, come to me."

"Kiss me, Genefer," said Silphine, throwing her arms round her cousin's neck; "I see just what you mean, and you've saved me."

"And saved him; that's more to the purpose," said Genefer, standing up straight and uncompromising.

"There, I don't mind if I do, though I hate slobbering as a general thing."

She made a peck at Silphine's cheek and finally hugged her with a sob. "You've got more grit in you than the little cat, Rosemary," she said at length.

Holding her tightly, Silphine whispered, "Genefer, you stand by us all, can't you look after Rosemary a bit?"

"She's as weak as touchwood," said Genefer, moved to metaphor by the heaps at her feet; "but I'll soon settle her, see if I don't."

"But," said Silphine, as they turned to go back, "it seems base ingratitude in some lights. You see, he's fed me and clothed me, and I owe everything to him."

"Feeding a pig may give you a right to kill it; but feeding a girl does n't make it right to sell her to a young Pen. He's bad, you know."

"Yes, I know; he ought n't to marry me. But what shall we all do for bread? And then there's Granny."

"Oh, and there's Isaac and fifty bothers. But just you sit tight; I'll worry you all through."

It seemed probable just then to Silphine that she would. With the joy of reaction Silphine was ready to run races with her own shadow. The two girls began, holding hands, to swing their arms in time to their quick steps. Silphine's mind ran to John Saxon, while Genefer's thoughts were concerned with speculations as to whether one could eat porridge for three meals a day or

only for two; she came to the conclusion that Isaac would never stand three.

Mr. Rosdew was one of the few Englishmen who believe in experts: to him marriage was chiefly a business for the legal adviser; old Lawyer Juliff was commonly considered a "tough old file" in law matters, but, unfortunately for Mr. Rosdew's calculations, conjugal phantoms have a tendency to induce a softening in files. Mr. Rosdew was consequently foiled, as most people would have been who had neglected to reckon with Genefer.

CHAPTER V

Woman Proposes

ROSEMARY ROSDEW was the typical woman of our forefathers, one would have said their ideal, had not one remembered some good mothers of those generations: she must be counted among the half-developed women of to-day. To her, to live meant to feel, to feel pleasure the sum-total of desirable existence, and to charm men's eyes and senses was pleasure. A stare from a stranger made her happy for hours; she deliberately counted which costume produced the greatest number of such stares, and dressed accordingly.

This idea, well known to many unmated women of forty, is then often nature's protest against the great thwarted instinct; in a girl not yet twenty a deeper tragedy, especially to the man who shall seek his peace from her; the smallest danger that threatens him is misogyny. Genefer, though a good judge of character, very often made huge mistakes in judging other women; she forgot that there are few stronger than those whose desires alone are their motive-force. Rosemary could see clearly the end at which she aimed, no cross-currents distracted her, and she could as delicately adjust the

means to that end as ever a scheming scientist. Her little brain had been set to work vigorously by the stern logic of facts as presented to her by Genefer's worldly-wise knowledge: Mr. Nix Calmady, a squire's son, could not marry a poor curate's niece, said Genefer; Rosemary was determined that he should. So like Mr. Juliff's Sara and many another woman of holy and profane writ, she digged a pit for the feet of youth, and his soul was fain to escape the hand of the fowler.

Down by the river on a February day Nix and Rosemary played their comedy, — self-conscious on her part, unconscious on his. It was a strange scene that they had chosen for it. The river dwindled to a mere stream that was but a silver streak in the midst of a drab monotony of mud when it had left the oaks of its upper course. As the tidal water receded, jutting boulders edged with brown weed showed above the mud, and with the rise and fall of the water the brown weed heaved. Green and slimy edges marked the high-water line, and beyond it bare rock formed an inconvenient pathway. Here Rosemary chose to walk, because inconvenience suited the mood of the moment. Nix walked on the green edge, which was decidedly slippery; the flash and glitter of the sunlight which lit up the sordid details of the mud-begirt river only seemed to mock him in his misery. In truth, he was but the worm that dangles on an urchin's hook; it is a part neither dignified nor pleasant in the playing.

"You never loved me; you never have. I always

doubted it, but now I 'm sure," said Rosemary, with a sob in her voice.

She was hurrying, and the waving curls at the base of her knot of black hair were very fascinating.

"Do stop; you 're maddening me," he gasped, as they came within the shadow of a cove where they were shut off from everything but the mud-bed and its silver streak.

"I wish I may die if I know what you are shooting at," he continued.

"Don't swear at me as if you were a great rough soldier," she pouted, perching herself on a shelving rock with a convenient ledge below for him. Rosemary had the true instinct for a situation, and would no more have placed herself where she could not look into his eyes than she would have thrown herself in the mud.

"It 's nothing but plain English that will bring you to your senses. What have I done that you should go on like this? For pity's sake, tell me." By this time he was kneeling by her side.

"When you know how miserable they are making me at home, too," she wailed. "Genefer never speaks a civil word to me, and I have n't had a new dress for ages."

"By the Holy Moses," shouted Nix, "I shall go right home and shoot myself if you don 't speak out. Right home, I tell you. What can I do to make you happier? My darling, you know I 'd die for you any day — and willing."

"Then I should n't have a friend in the world," she

said with a wan smile like that of a lost child; she was Greuze's study of sorrow for the moment.

"Tell me, tell me," he whispered, slipping his arm round her shoulders.

"Could n't we, could n't we go away and get married, Nix dearest, if you love me — and I 'm very unhappy if you don't?"

Nix stood stock-still, then his arms tightened round her.

"Rosemary, don't; you are only a child, and you don't know what you are saying."

"Yes, I do," she said, rubbing her nose meditatively up and down his cheek like a calf of an inquiring turn of mind; "we shall have to be married sometime, and I 'd rather you bought me my dresses and things than that Uncle Rosdew did."

"That 's just it," he said ruefully, flushing painfully, as she could see; "the pater is n't rich, and things cost such a lot. Besides, he 'll set the whole show on fire when he hears what I 've done."

Rosemary had thought of all this: "Then don't let him hear of it till it 's all over. Then he 'll have to give in. You know I 'm just lovely with old men."

He did not answer. The screw must be turned a little more; loosening his arms and withdrawing from him, she said, "Then it 's true what I said, — you don't love me. Let me go home — if I can get there."

She really looked white and ill; a hungry lioness might have been softened. "My life, my life, why, it 's Para-

dise you're offering me. Don't you know it's the one thing I ask for, pray for?"

Nix was no longer the rollicking young blade of the days before the reign of Rosemary. He looked suddenly older; white hairs would scarcely have surprised one.

"Dear one, dear one, take me away," she whispered in his ear.

It was more than he could stand. His mind, being practical, had already foreseen the means.

"We'll go by the coach to-morrow morning. I've just had my allowance, so we shall have some of the yellow boys to go on with."

Rosemary thought she had calculated the time correctly.

"And we'll go away as Gran did," she clapped her hands behind his neck and gave him a big kiss on the forehead, "and it'll turn out all right as hers did. How lovely to be run away with! But, even supposing I can give Genefer the slip to-morrow morning, how am I to manage about my things? I could n't smuggle a box out, you know."

"Oh, we must get some frocks in town," he said, laughing at the childish difficulty as well as he could for the thumping of his heart; somehow this hardly seemed the right Paradise.

"Shall we? How splendid! but I shall want lots of things besides frocks."

"Oh, hats, I suppose," he said, jumping her down from the rock and wondering whether he was playing a

blackguard part to somebody or not; of one thing only was he absolutely certain, — that no man could have resisted the child who was so ignorant of her own power.

Late that night Rosemary's room was gaily lit up by every candle she had been able to lay hands on. She had even bought a box of coloured candles and had rigged a double line of them on each side of her mirror. Moreover, she held a candle above her head, so that the light flashed as she moved it towards her face and then away. No painter studying light and shade could have devoted more anxious care to the angle at which it was to be held. At last she decided that the beauty of flaming cheeks and bright eyes, the glow of youth with its unworn surfaces, was best illumined by the candle held directly above, so that the light streamed downwards in sheets over her little figure. But the hair was not right; with a quick, bird-like movement that recalled Granny Rosdew, she placed the candle on the table, seized a comb and rearranged the front with a parting down the middle. That was better; smooth, demure brow and laughing lips doubled the charm of the luring face. Suddenly she pursed up her lips in a little pout; that was best of all. Holding the candle aloft again, she turned her left profile towards the glass. Yes; a pout was the fairest expedient, and the left profile showed a dimple. Dimples, she concluded, give subtlety to a smile.

"Lovely, lovely," murmured Rosemary to herself, as she bent forward and pressed her warm, soft lips to the

glass; "and oh, Nix, Nix, you can't resist me one little atom."

Suddenly Genefer's step was heard outside. Rosemary blew out the candles so eagerly that her round distended cheeks looked like those of a fat cloud-seraph. She blew out every one, so that when Genefer opened the door the only thing that greeted her was a great candle-fume.

It was the high-water mark of her life that Rosemary had reached; through the triumph time that men agonise to win and often die without gaining, she lived that night. It was not her first taste of power, but the sweetest, because of the struggle that preceded it. A woman's joy in the power of her beauty only reaches rapture when it is employed in the overcoming of obstacles. With a sling and a stone went forth a shepherd lad; with a little cunning goes a fair woman, and woe to Goliath.

The Beauty hugged herself at the idea of escape from the stricken house where she divined the coming disasters; it was the departure of the rats from the doomed vessel, this flitting of Rosemary and Nix.

CHAPTER VI

At the Gates of Eden

GLOUG, gloug, went the water-spouts as they pumped streams of water across the pavements. The wind was blowing in gusts that flung the raindrops on the windows with the rattle of hailstones, and with every gust a branch of honeysuckle struck against the glass.

On the table of the lodging-house sitting-room lay the fragments of a meal at which one person alone had evidently been sitting. With advantage there might have been less dust in the room and less ash in the grate, but Eden's joys make one oblivious of such facts, though Eden without an Eve is certainly an unthinkable position. It seemed indeed to trouble the man who, with his hands in his pockets, stood trying to look out of the window. Labouring sighs, that came as fast as minute-guns, testified to the fact that he recognised the cruelty of his position. Eve, had she been attentive to her duties, would have noted that his tie wanted arranging, that the band of his Norfolk jacket was fastened in a year when fashion demanded that it should be draped behind the back. Nix Calmady, alone in this room,

seemed the very picture of the "true, moaning turtle," as the ancient tombstone has it. He had been "reviewing" his position for three or four hours on end, and as a young man of his calibre never goes through this process save when he is in sore straits, there is reason to assume that his affairs were in a bad way.

He had not derived much benefit from any spiritual ministrations, but the words of a well-known parable had been haunting his mind this morning with a persistent reiteration in which he realised an application to his own circumstances. Nix had, in fact, written twice to his father, and in each case the letter had been returned unopened. The elder Mr. Calmady was evidently not inclined to play the part assigned to him in the parable: he took the elder brother's view. But the situation was not as easy as that. Down in the depths where the primeval passions lie, below the forced and carefully cultivated qualities of social life, he almost wished it were. Dependent on his father, with no profession that he could practise to satisfy his necessities, at the end of his resources, above all, with a horrible doubt of himself, a commoner complication, the knots of which could be broken as easily as straw, would have been welcomed. And even when he felt this, — it could not be said that the perception reached actual thought, — his heart smote him. She, Eve, was such a tender child that he swore at himself for allowing one breath of the wind of care to touch her, and yet he himself had that secret treachery within him, — he who had vowed to stand between her

and all sorrow. Nix Calmady had never before felt himself as other than a good fellow who got on with everyone; now he felt himself an utter cur who ought to be horsewhipped. But he was, on the whole, taking the beating well, and the bearing of it was likely to make a man of him. He had just braced himself up with the resolve to force the old man to help him, when the hand he was putting up to smooth his ruffled hair was arrested in mid-air.

In two strides he was out of the room; in another two he had flung the front door open. The noise he made convinced his landlady that she had a madman as well as a pauper on the premises.

"Genefer, Genefer!" he cried, dragging a dripping figure into the house. In the old days he had disliked her as much as his easy-going nature could dislike anyone, but at that moment she seemed to him an angel come straight from heaven.

"Stand off, or you'll have a shower bath," said Genefer, vigorously stripping off her mackintosh and shaking it in the doorway. "I'm more like a water-dog than anything else," she said, eying the traces left on the carpet by her wet boots.

"Never mind. Have some lunch. Do let me see what's here," he said, poking the remains of a piece of beef with a carving-knife.

"I don't want anything. Sit down, and don't fidget."

She had already taken her boots off and was toasting

her stockinged feet at the fire, whilst the discarded boots were turned, soles upward, to dry.

"Oh, I 'm so glad to see you;" he had to get up and shake her hand vigorously once more. "You seem to have brought Widdicombe along with you."

"Thank goodness, I have n't," said Genefer. "You 're a nice young man, you are. You 've beaten me. I 'll own up to that, and somehow I think more of you than I ever did before. I did n't think it was in you to beat me."

"Well, I don't know that I feel exactly proud of myself." It was on the tip of his tongue to declare how little of the escapade had been due to his own initiative, but, after all, Nix was a gentleman. "I 'm in a precious mess," he went on gloomily.

"I guess you are. That 's why I came to see you. Rosemary wrote, you know."

"She never told me," he said with a start of surprise.

"But where," said Genefer, "where, in the name of Fortune, is she? I did n't write before, or come, because the billing and cooing does n't altogether suit my complaint. I thought it might be over by now."

"She 's lying down upstairs," said Nix, getting up to poke the fire, which did not need it. "I have n't seen her since breakfast time."

"I say, what have you been doing? She always does that when she 's as mad as can be."

"Oh, she used to do it, did she?"

"Of course she did. Say she could n't have a new

hat, and she 'd lie and sulk for a whole day, kicking her heels on the bed. You should have come to me. I could have told you all about it."

"But how in the name of common-sense could I have guessed such a thing?"

"Well, I suppose you could n't," said Genefer, laughing. "Have you made it up with your father yet?"

"No, nor likely. He 's sent back my letters twice."

"What are you living on?"

Nix elaborately turned out the pockets of his garments till the linings stood out from his person. "That 's what we 've got to live on," said he.

"And that 's why they don't clear away your meals, or dust your room, or sweep your carpet. You 've done it this time, and no mistake."

"That 's just what we have n't," said Nix, carefully avoiding her eye. "She wants a grand wedding, with bridesmaids and cake, and she goes into fits if I talk of another sort of splicing."

"What," said Genefer, starting up, "do you mean to say?"

"Yes, I do."

"Nicholas Calmady," said Genefer, standing over him with both hands on his shoulders, "are you a rascal, or are you not?"

"Upon my soul, it is n't my fault," he answered; "she says the Registry Office is loathsome; and first of all we thought we could n't do it without somebody's consent, and then, latterly, we 've not had enough money. It

just flew the first week, I give you my word of honour. She's got my mother's ring, and you don't think that I'd put that on her finger if it was n't all on the straight."

"Oh, oh, oh, what a set, what a set I've got to do with!"

For once Genefer was at her wit's end with amazement; there was a moment's silence. The destruction of an illusion is always a painful process, since illusion is the cloud drapery with which mortals drape the angularities and nodosities of this inconvenient universe, but fortunately the power of self-delusion is hydra-headed, and no caustic will keep new illusions from growing, not even the cynic's potent liniment. Genefer had battled with the disappointment of discovering her own powerlessness to divert the course of other people's lives; she was now to learn the folly of fools. But she soon rallied from the blow.

"See," she said, pointing to her purse, "find out what it costs. I know nothing about it, but this must be put right at once."

"But what about Rosemary?"

"I'll see to Rosemary," she said significantly, making for the door, "and I'm going to see your father; he'll stand from a woman who's a stranger what he'll never take from his son."

"Genefer, you are a brick."

"Don't cry before you are out of the wood, young man. Just show me Rosemary's door."

"It 's above this room."

"You foolish people, if you were hard up why did you take front rooms?"

Standing over Rosemary, Genefer absolutely hissed out her words. "You 're a shameless little hussy, that for Isaac's sake I ought n't to touch with the tip of my finger, and I would n't if it were not for Nix. Get up instantly, instantly," she repeated, "get up; it 's too late to make an honest woman of you, but a married woman you shall be."

And she was, before her tormentor went back to Widdicombe.

"Buck up and take a chili," said Genefer, as she bade good-bye to Nix at the railway-station. "You 've tied a millstone round your neck, but some people are the better for a weight or two to give them ballast."

"Only get me some work to do, Genefer. Tell my father that there is n't anything I would n't do. Why, I am as strong as a navvy, and there is n't a job that I can lay hands on. You don't know what it feels to have a head and hands and never a chance of turning an honest penny."

"Work, work, and never a job for you; but it 's the millstone that 's brought you to the wish for it. Never mind, old boy, we all move under weights, and I don't know but what we 're the better for them."

"There are, worse luck, two kinds,—the kind you tie on yourself and the kind you have to thank other people for," said Nix, gloomily.

"You 've got to bear both," said Genefer, "and it 'll be as good as half-a-dozen children to you."

"Don't, Genefer, I love her, and I was always just the same, — for ever wanting a new toy."

"And will be again," said Genefer; "it 's a healthy symptom."

This victory won had cured the wound to her self-esteem, and given her courage for the next essay, — the bearding of the Calmady lion in his den. "Write soon, for Heaven's sake," called Nix after her, as he felt that his Mr. Greatheart was leaving him.

Rosemary had performed penance by the time Nix returned, for she had dusted the sitting-room, and dusting was of all work the most hateful to her: it spoiled her hands and tarnished the gloss of her hair. It was with all the abandonment of abject humiliation that she flung her arms round Nix, for Rosemary had the virtue of fastidiousness both in physical and moral matters, and Genefer's attitude towards this Bohemian episode had troubled the only germ of conscience she possessed. She felt as if her heart were tender from the torture, as if a bad dream were over. She had felt herself so stainless that, for all the hereditary taint of recklessness, in consciousness at least, no blame could touch her. It was the bitterest moment of a butterfly life when Genefer voiced for her the world's view, even bitterer than the weeks during which it had been driven home to her mind that none of Nix's relations were going to take any notice of her, that to them she was but an atom of no more importance than

the mote is to the great beam it dances in. In Widdicombe she had been the prettiest of the Rosdew girls; here she was only important to her landlady, who regarded her solely as a bad speculation.

There was more love in her heart for Nix that night when he returned from seeing Genefer off than there had ever been in the days when she had lorded it over all who came near her. Moreover, the love she rested on was ready; they held each other like two children in the bewildering noise of the world's din, and like two children found comfort in each other's nearness. Whatever the baffling power of circumstance might have in store for them, whatever the incalculable interaction of character to crush and deaden, they had at least learnt the power that is born of disappointment to ennoble life. "Flour of the wheat, that 's what comes of millstones," thought Nix to himself, as he held Rosemary in the navvy-like arms that ached for a job.

There is no love so closely linked as that which has suffered together; when all the loves that are shall be closely welded by the sorrows they have borne together, then pain's use will be over.

Chapter VII

The Master of Foxes Woodland

"THERE's one of the nuts that I've smashed a tooth or two over," said Genefer to herself, as she hurried over her dressing on the day after another interview with her father concerning the Pentecost affair. "Well," she continued, "I've just got to chew upon the other side, as the dentist said when he'd smashed one of his patient's jaws. Wonder if I'm going to break any over old Calmady."

She had ascertained that the train from Plymouth would take her within a couple of miles of Foxes Woodland, the home of the Calmadys.

The road from the station, after taking one curve through woodland, came out on the side of a bare hill, whence the surrounding country lay stretched before the wayfarer.

The southern edge of the moorland was marked by a ring of tors, a line all pale purple with yellow patches here and there that merged in the blue-grey of the heights beyond. Southward and westward the rolling valley-land alternated between woodland clusters round farms and bare expanses of arable and pasture fields. The clear, stinging quality of the wind, as it blew in gusts from

the north, marked the nearness of the moorland and matched the circling background of sentinel tors. The scene was like a life where the tiny pleasures of every-day existence are kept full of meaning by the presence in the background of a purpose that involves struggle and even privation, though a struggle that knows little of the beetling crags of heroic exertion. Bodily life was a clean and wholesome thing in this air, which strung Genefer up to a quicker step and a braver bearing as she felt its cool rush on her face.

Passing six great elms that clasped the soil they grew from with knotted roots like huge claws, she saw to the right the square church tower with the broad dreamy clock-face that speaks of leisurely life and still more leisurely sleeping after life, without any of that regret for the passing hours which dwells in the shadow of the sun-dial. At last Foxes Woodland was before her, and promptly did away with the confidence begotten of the north wind. It was a long building, with tower-like bay windows, half buried in sheltering trees. The low paling showed an expanse of park with a stream of moor-water swirling in easy fashion through the grass. There was a plank bridge across the stream for the benefit of people on foot who wished to avoid the windings of the drive. The water and the planks of the bridge were a distinct consolation to Genefer, for she was close to the upper waters of the Widey, to which the Foxes Wood-land brook must form a tributary. Widey water, if only in the form of a streamlet, made her feel at home, and

the plank bridge was decidedly informal. She used to say afterwards that the combined influence of the two alone prevented an ignominious retreat, but Genefer had a way of never estimating her own courage aright.

The plank bridge and the park were crossed in a series of heart-beats, and in a dream she followed the man into a long room looking out on the park. It was a pleasant room, though the carpet was worn and the furniture scanty. Genefer knew nothing about pictures, but the wall opposite the windows seemed to her excited fancy but an opening into the limitless expanses of southern hills and valleys, with a waving of pine-trees in the foreground. A former Calmady had found his life too narrow, and had widened it by buying pictures suggestive of vast horizons. Unfortunately his desire for a wider point of view had only narrowed his means.

An old man rose from an armchair near a small fire that burnt but dimly in the light which flooded the room. Genefer quickly wheeled round with her back to the windows, so that he stood in the full gleam of spring light. She saw a face whose original keenness had widened and shallowed into what was merely a look of care. The pointed beard, the quick dark eyes, the broad mobile lips, might have belonged to an Elizabethan forefather, but the Elizabethan faces only grew keener with the passing of the years; the eating cares could fret the worn surfaces, but never dull the lines of them. This man was the product of a less hopeful age.

"To what am I indebted for this honour?" he began

in a dazed manner; visitors were rare at Foxes Woodland, and the heat of fire and sun had thrown him into a doze.

"My name is Genefer Rosdew," began his visitor, crossing cold and shaky finger-tips in front of her, with a feeling that her remark sounded like the beginning of the Catechism; "and I've just come to talk to you about your son Nix."

"Are you the girl he has married?" asked the old man, harshly, motioning her to a chair; "because in that case your visit seems to me rather useless."

"I should n't be a Rosdew now, you see, if I were a Calmady's wife," said Genefer, in an explanatory tone. "No; I 'm Rosemary's cousin. Rosemary is the girl he has married, you know."

"Is she like you, may I ask?"

"Not a bit," answered Genefer; "she 's a beauty, and, as Gran says, I 'm all bones. Anyway, I 'm not a beauty, and she is. She really looks lovely when her hair 's all down, and she's in her — dressing-gown; but of course you won't see her like that. Then she ties on ribbons and scents herself and all that nonsense. I don't do that sort of thing."

Mr. Calmady was sufficiently amazed by his visitor's array of confidences, but before he could speak Genefer went on briskly, —

"Of course you're wondering what I've come to see you for exactly. It was n't to tell you that Rosemary scents herself; I 'm not quite such a fool as that. You

see, Nix has done a thing he ought to be whipped for doing; we all know that. Anyway, he 's suffered for it enough by now, and Rosemary 's pretty and — good. Of course she 's good; besides, she 's lady-like, not like me a bit, you know, — she is, really."

"Permit me to say that I have had no opportunity of forming an opinion of my son's wife, nor do I expect to have any; I wash my hands of him entirely. Hare-brained recklessness such as this I cannot possibly condone."

"And he 's all the child that you have," said Genefer, simply.

The shot told.

"Ay," said the old man, after a pause; "there 'll be a Nicholas Calmady here still after I am gone. I can't prevent that, but I can — "

"Show him the way to ruin, so that there sha'n't be a Nicholas Calmady to succeed at all," interposed Genefer, in a rage; "and it 's all more your fault than his. Why did n't you give him a trade so that he could earn his own living? What on earth did you expect him to do but to get into mischief? "

"There was no possible profession but one of the two services, — for a Calmady, — and that was too expensive. Besides, he was an only son. But you really cannot be expected to understand all the circumstances which would weigh with a Calmady. He 's made his bed and must lie on it."

"When you stood on the other side and helped him

lay the sheets on — so — and put the pillows on — so — "

Genefer illustrated with a rapid play of hand and arm.

"See," she said, bending forward and laying a hand on his arm, "give him a chance, help him somehow. Don't send him straight to the bow-wows; he 'll do any work you can get for him. Send him out to the colonies to rough it, if you like, but do something."

Mr. Calmady began to pace backwards and forwards with his head sunk on his breast; this was a queer mad creature, but, after all —

"And," said Genefer, as she watched him, "he did n't do it all, nor did you. There 's Rosemary; she 's got a way with her that gets over men, and she was sweet and he was young. Do forgive him, there 's a dear man, if you only get a stone-breaking job for him."

"They 're much better broken by machinery, and I know Nix's way of doing things."

"So they are, I daresay," said Genefer, soothingly; "but you are going to help him, are n't you? How are they to live else? And there are sure to be babies," she added frankly.

"Did he send you?" burst out Mr. Calmady, hastily. "He calls it manly, I suppose, to be skulking behind a woman's petticoats, and yet he 's of a breed that used not to shirk in the old days."

Those old days, so unreal to the majority of us, were a living presence to Mr. Calmady, who lived in a quiet land where the bygone lives speak more clearly than in

the haunts of eager strife for to-morrow's gain. Mr. Calmady dreaded to-morrow; yesterday had been a good day for his race.

"I don't wait in general to be asked to do a thing that 's got to be done," said Genefer, evasively; "no, he did n't ask me — and I don't tell lies. For another thing, let me tell you, I 'm not one of those who wait to see a house fall for want of a brick or two. There 's a lot of 'get there' about me."

"There seems to be. You 've done a bold thing in coming here, but it 's a pity that Nix, if he must marry one of your family, did n't choose you."

"Oh, I should have sent him to the right-about in a brace of shakes. I 'm already bespoken, and Isaac 's worth a dozen of Nix."

"You speak slightingly, Miss Genefer, but Nix has his good points."

"Yes, I know. I should n't be here else. Come now, there 's a good soul, see what you can do for him. He 's like a tail-piped dog now; untie him and give him a bit of a race, if it 's only because he 's all that you have."

"All I have; yes, that 's true."

The old man, as he walked up and down the room, confessed to himself that she had struck the right note.

"And," said Genefer, "come and sit down and tell me what you are going to do. Let 's talk it over comfortably. With you going up and down, tramp, tramp, it 's enough to make a cricket turn up his trotters."

Mr. Calmady sank heavily into his chair, while Genefer ruthlessly read the lines on his grey old face. She felt more sorry for him now than for Nix. He had said very little: it was not the way of a Calmady; but he was a man with the only hope of his old age cut away from him — through his own pride. The fact that it was partly his own deed made Genefer all the more sorry for him.

"Dad 's got me," she said to herself; "and the old man wants Nix as dad would want me if I crossed over Jordan.

"See here," she said, putting a lean, ugly hand on his knee, "you 've got land; give him something to do on it. He 's country-bred and knows the ropes, if he has had a silver feeding-bottle to suck at."

"There 's 'Light and Come In," said Mr. Calmady to himself, "and, after all, the yeoman life was the life of the old manor-houses of long ago. Why should n't we go back?"

"And a good, cheerful name it is, too," said Genefer; "there 's something hearty about it, though I know no more than Moses what you 're aiming at."

"It 's a farm that was once a manor-house, and was called 'Unlight,' or 'Alight,' and 'Come In' — otherwise, ''Light and Come In.' The tenant leaves next Lady-day, and I 've been wondering what I 'm to do with it, failing a tenant."

"Put Nix in it, let him run it and rake in the shekels. Of course, you could worry round and be on the spot to

back him up. Why, it will make your fortune. What sort of a house is it?"

"An old manor-house tumbling to ruin. It's been a farm since the Calmadys removed to Foxes Woodland, and it's had very little repair of any sort."

"Money tight, of course," said Genefer, briskly. "Well, that's a pity, for Rosemary's a bit finicky in her notions. Heigh-ho, we'll have to make a bower for her somehow, you and I."

"So that's the sort she is," said Mr. Calmady, grimly; "there has n't been much of a bower in 'Light and Come In since the days when Raleigh played bowls and smoked his pipe there and said his prayers in the chapel."

"Good shot," said Genefer; "we'll talk about Raleigh and then she won't smell the pigs or hear the quacking of the ducks. Chapel, is there? Why, it'll be like a baronial hall to her."

"The chapel is now, unfortunately, a storehouse for cider-barrels," said Mr. Calmady, drily, "and they've planted out the bowling-green in—"

"Cabbages," suggested Genefer.

"No, onions."

"Which is worse," said Genefer, ruefully; "never mind, we can pull up the onions, that's one blessing. Let's go over and see it, for you're going to have Nix round once more, and he's going to furbish up his muscles and brains and make a good start."

"You're sure he'll take it? Mind, it'll be no fancy work. I'll have none of that. He shall put in all his time at it, as if he — "

"Had been called Hodge all his life," said Genefer. "He'll take it straight as a gun; don't you fret about that."

"And his lady wife?"

"I shall make a few remarks to her," answered Genefer, getting up and evidently ready to start for any possible destination.

The farm was about a mile away from Foxes Woodland. Cheerfully as she had spoken, Genefer's heart sank within her as she thought of the dainty tip-tilted nose of Rosemary and looked at 'Light and Come In. Then she stiffened up her muscles with delightful thoughts of clattering pails and scrubbing-brushes, of strong brown labouring arms, and all that they might accomplish. Genefer possessed, like all healthy sons and daughters of old Mother Earth, a great love for the face of the old lady, and a keen delight in the idea of freshening up an inch or two of it and of making it once more a delight to every sense.

Certainly 'Light and Come In formed a squalid enough picture, but even then it was open-air squalor, not that of the back alley. The fields were well cared for, and the prospect was of valleys and of wind-swept hilltops, where the trees clustered bravely in answer to the challenge of the bugle of the winds from every quarter.

The house had been built in the days when men instinctively turned to the sunshine and caught every ray they could to breathe happy life into their cosy, wood-panelled haunts. At 'Light and Come In there were no rooms with windows looking east, where only a belt of elms and oaks guarded the grey walls, eyeless in that direction but for the decorated eastern window of the chapel, which, glassless and mutilated, peered out still in lasting memorial of the faith that looks for the dawning, even in that cold quarter whence comes the bite of death. The ancient builders turned their backs on the stern chill of the east for purposes of every-day companionship; but they knew, like all great ages, from what direction stark strength is derived. The outer chapel wall bounded the courtyard on the side of the road, and at the end of it an arch of weathered granite enclosed the entrance. Within the yard the bowing heads of ducks, first plunged deep in oozy mud and then lifted skyward for better appreciation of choice morsels, outlined the track of a muddy watercourse crossed by a plank. The champing of corn sounded from the lower end of the chapel, for it was now the stable underneath, while a floor had been built within to give double room for storage purposes; rough granite steps led to the upper floor from outside. A second gateway with granite balls on the posts led to a paved yard and thence into a deep porch with one window in it which had been walled up since the days of the window tax.

The mullioned, leaded panes of the hall, now the farm kitchen, looked out on the mud expanse over a low granite wall and thence on the granary and the stacks. Beyond the hall a central stairway, wide and low, led to the one floor above, where the four bedrooms, two on each side, looked southwest over what had once been the bowling-green. The long shallow rooms seemed to catch every ray of light, and the wide window-seats, the oak-carved vines and grapes of the high mantelpieces, spoke of hours so far remote that they faded into infinite distance.

The sitting-rooms were filled with lumber now; a cradle, a stray saddle, children's toys, occupied the room where Sir Walter had perhaps felt a shivering forecast of the dark hour that awaited him. Queer Dutch tiles caught the light as Genefer opened the shutters and threw them back into the wall spaces left for them. The room, even in its ugly state of neglect, offered a sunny welcome of its own, as old rooms can where gracious lives have been lived.

"It 'll do," said Genefer, decidedly. "Sir Walter must hearten up poor Rosemary."

The onions and, appropriate union, the ducks, even the stray pig that accosted her with a grunt as she crossed the yard, made Genefer feel quite gentle towards Rosemary.

"We 'll have ducks, onions, and pigs," she said cheerfully to Mr. Calmady; "but we won't have them just where they are now. Snakes, Nix and I will just

have to buckle to; and," she added frankly, "we shall want a little stumping up, too."

That night a telegram reached Nix,—

"Garrison capitulated after obstinate siege. Commander's letter follows."

Chapter VIII

Delilah

THE foamy lacework of the cow-parsley was flung in festoons outlining the living gold of the buttercups; sunshine on English meadows, how often to dying eyes has the gleam of it rivalled all the Hebraic glitter of the streets of the Four-square city. But the eyes of Silphine and John Saxon were no dying eyes, for in them the fire of life was burning, not dim but radiant. The veined green of the beeches shimmered above them, and as the bird-calls grew sleepy in the heat of the afternoon, it seemed that an Æolian harp sounded among the grasses where they lay; it was the myriad insect hum, but it sounded like the pulsing of Nature's heart beneath the blessing she bore in her bosom, fruit for man and beast, the gift to her of the sun-god. Most heart-stirring of all the sounds of life it sounded in their ears till the beating of their own hearts, the riotous music of humanity, deafened all sounds of less sentient and conscious life. The mystery of creation is solved by moments like this, even if they only come in perfection to but one here and there of the toiling millions; is not the discomfort of

existence worth paying, that consciousness may yield a long second's rapture, even though the voices of lower life rush in the moment afterwards?

At last John Saxon's laugh broke the spell, especially since the cause of it Silphine could not fathom, as the bell-note of the cuckoo throbbed from the distance, thrilling from treetop to treetop and recalling to her lover the Elizabethan song.

"Come away farther into the wood," said Silphine, "where one cannot see the apple-trees in the distance." These were not lawless as the wildwood trees: trim domesticity spoke in them, and to-day she was all pagan. Men never worshipped in groves of apple-trees save with the hearth-fire lit in the immediate neighbourhood.

Deeper in the wood the ivied boulders stood shapeless to horror, monstrous, like sins against nature; there seemed a brooding silence over them, but beyond, the sunlight gleamed again through the beeches, and the yellow meadows flung their warm reflection into the cool shadowed place.

"You are an elemental," said John, as they flung themselves among the couch-grass; "the sun and the wind and the cool starry nights are your brothers and sisters."

"Can elementals feel pain as I have?" she asked, her eyes fixed on the golden distance; she was minded to let him know he had offended.

"As you have?"

"Yes, as I have. Do you think I have n't cared

that you valued me so little that anyone might take me; or leave me, as they pleased? Would an elemental not mind that, because if so I should like to be one? All these months when Genefer and I have been struggling you never cared what became of me, scarcely ever concerned yourself about me."

"There was no question of taking or leaving: you were mine; I knew that quite well."

He scarcely heeded what he was saying; a fear of himself was numbing mind and senses. But a woman's fear of man is merely a conventional product, the result of long ages of enforced man-pleasing; it has no kinship with the real thing, man's fear of woman, which must have existed somewhere even before the *dénouement* of the flaming sword at Eden's gates. She leant forward till he felt her breath on his forehead, as he lay below her.

"What would make me not belong to 'ee?" she whispered, as the old Devon cooed softly.

"If I thought there was anything that could take you from me, I would — make you mine altogether," he said hoarsely, rising to his feet unsteadily and looking down at her; "but I can't take you with me even if you were free to come."

She put up a hand in protestation. "Don't talk of Gran now or of death; sure, and it 's life now that I want." There was something panther-like in the lissom writhe she made into a patch of warm sunlight falling between the branches; the light shone on the bright

lips and the clearness of the cool skin. She had slept for long hours the night before, — an unusual thing with her in the fierce heats of early summer. The movement repelled him suddenly as nothing he had ever seen in her before had done. He took it for a pose, to show the glow on her skin, to attract him more resistlessly. In truth, this was the last manner just now in which the woman in Silphine would have declared itself, though she would have been capable enough, in the outer courts of man's favour, of consciously baiting her hook; just now the movement was due to a mere instinct for warmth. Silphine was not the first to pay for merely potential sins. John Saxon turned away, a chill deadening his beating pulses: had he made a mistake? The first possibility of it began to dawn on him; to transplant this woodland thing, rough with all the non-moral of wild life, to — what? To a little flat where the children would wear sandals and be fed on the newest scientific diet, mental and physical, to eat bread and milk out of green art bowls, never to taste meat, and in other ways to be rationally trained. This was not the woman; he wanted a wife after the trained town fashion.

In the distance a church clock sounded faintly; the wind was changing, and a breeze from the sea stirred the darkening beechen leaves and cooled his lips with a salt tang. The meadow scents, heavy, luscious with bursting bud and seed, seemed gone; gone the dreaminess of time measured only by dandelion clocks, gone too the passion of the first hour. And yet? Silphine watched

him curiously, her heart growing slowly leaden. She never knew quite what her movement lost her — or saved her from; the little hinges on which doors turn are never more hidden than when the door is shut.

Silently she rose to return, chilled at last into woman's second nature, that called maidenliness. She had been often told that one must not show one's feelings: it was then true; but still she could not keep silence, for fear drove.

"What have I done? Is it that I love 'ee too dearly?"

"No, no," he said, drawing her hand within his arm; "it's only that I've been too long in a strait-jacket, that I judge too hardly what's just natural."

"I'm only common, my heaven," she cried, pushing him away and covering her eyes with her hands, "but I'd fairly die for 'ee. There, it's out, and Gran warned me not to show too plainly."

So she could not even be simply sensuous; it was courtesan-like, and his eyes grew colder still. But in time — and, indeed, she should have time whilst he was away — she would learn to tone down this exuberance that might have suited a farm wench, not the wife of the flat.

"The air is n't very good for us down here," he remarked grimly; "the meadow scents are bad for other things than hay fever."

The townsman resents this intrusion of simplicity: it needs now many contacts with Mother Earth to renew strength; 't is not so easy as in mythical days. And still

the cuckoo bell tolled out of the sky, where the grey clouds swept before the sea-wind.

The contradictory elements in a man never wage such fierce war as in his relations with women. There was something Dutch in the main stream of John Saxon's consciousness: prosaic perfection, untouched by emotion, the commonplaces of life lived through minutely, exactly, — these were his reasonable ideas: the slow study of perfection in trifles, — this he loved. But across this placid stream there flashed strange storms; like an English brook, with tropic birds on its banks, his life. In Literature, after Economics and Social History, he would plunge into Creole tales, in love sensuousness, attracted and at the same time repelled. With Dutch blood goes Puritanism, and to John Saxon, who made conduct not three-fourths, but the whole of life, who sought the satisfaction of living every moment consciously in the narrow path, the plumage on the dove at mating time was an offence, — especially when worn by the female bird. And yet, and yet, the Creole in him loved the colour of it, and Dutch backgrounds lost their homely charm for a time. The net result of all this was that the discomfort of his own sensations, due in reality to his own double-mindedness, passed into Pharisaic condemnation of the woman; the woman, she did beguile me, — a time-honoured plea. So John Saxon fled, being unmindful of Ecclesiastes and his "Be not righteous overmuch." And the single-minded simplicity of Silphine, seeing no more evil in Nature's ways than a

bird, suffered uncomprehendingly till circumstance had played its old trick of disciplining unrestraint. If the civilised man is he who can reasonably trust his own instincts, it is a sure thing that John Saxon was not civilised: his reason and his instincts were only too often at war, and, like those who live in Northern climes, he distrusted Nature. One wonders what a Dutch race transplanted into Italy, the land where Nature is trusted, would become. But there was no immediate probability of the transplantation of John Saxon; he remained a naturalised Dutchman, hailing, ancestrally speaking, from the Fens.

Chapter IX

Granny's Candlemas Day

THE June air was filled full of sunny light, and the red blood circled in the veins of life till mere breathing was a joy; but Granny's eyes were at last bent, not sunwards, but into the brown, warm bosom where we put our tired ones, and whence the white flower springs. Silphine sent for Mr. Pentecost, for she knew what was in Granny's mind towards him.

"Mr. Pentecost," she said, "Gran's dying, but she will want to see you before she goes."

Her beauty, blurred by nights of watching and days of weariness, would surely have had no repulsion now for John Saxon.

"And I should like to see her before she goes," said Mr. Pentecost, grimly.

"You must not do what you intend," said Silphine, suddenly laying hands on him to constrain him; "she knows nothing about Uncle Cornelius being in your hands and of your making him a bankrupt, and she is not to know."

"Then you will marry my son."

"Listen, Mr. Pentecost; I am already engaged, so I cannot do what you say. Nor could I if I were not engaged."

"Then I shall tell her my intentions. In any case, I believe you Rosdews have some fancy about the dead knowing what's going on here. So it won't be much better for her, as she will know, anyhow. Mind this, no power on earth shall prevent my using my power over him."

"Perhaps she may know; but on the other side she won't have this bodily weakness, and she may see farther and understand better. Promise me you won't say a word to poison an old woman's last moments."

"And why not?"

"Because you are n't really a bad man, and you would never forget, never, how mean you 'd been. Mr. Pentecost, you don't like mean things. You 're bigger altogether than that."

"But don't you see what I want for my son?"

Every word she spoke carried a conviction of power that matched his own love of the attribute; he had never wanted to win her so much before.

"You 'd keep him straight, make him all his mother could n't make him —" his voice broke. What was his old pride coming to?

"I wish I could; but even if I were free I could n't make any difference to him. He is n't really like me anywhere."

"Ay, and like calls to like."

It was the farmer's final verdict on his son. Their eyes met for a moment, each with the same knowledge.

"You 've won, hands down," he said at last. "Selina Rosdew sha'n't hear a word from me, and, indeed, she would n't have, anyway; I 'm not a cur. But I suppose I could n't expect you to know that. You 're a brave lass and a straight one, though. But you could n't be any daughter o' mine. I made my mistake twenty year agone, and I 've paid ever since. That sort o' mistake means a long bill, a very long bill indeed."

The next day Gran did what Silphine had expected her to do, — prepared for her farewells; she knew her own condition, but absolutely refused to stay in her bed by day.

"Nay, nay," she said; "I 've seen none too much of this world. I 'll see it to the end. Maybe I 'll not like the next one as well. Death 's a bedfellow I sha'n't lie and wait for."

Propped up in elbow-chair in the sun, she refused any longer to "read the cards," as had been her daily practice for twenty years.

"It 's my Candlemas Day," she said, when Jenny Hammick, who was acting as nurse, brought them to her. "Do ye mind, Jenny?

'On Candlemas Day,
Throw cards and candlesticks away.'

I 've thrown mine away."

After a pause she said to Silphine, —

"I 'm going to make up a proper ending, you 'll see. I want you to go and fetch Jemmy Juliff here. Make him come by a certain time, and then tell Pentecost to come here, and set the time for him a quarter of an hour later. Now, mind you heed what I say; always pull the strings for them, one man go, t' other man come, that 's the way a woman 's got to set 'em in the right way. Many a maid 's played the fool through not minding that."

Mr. Juliff arrived in half an hour; Mr. Pentecost was expected in another quarter. The restless old hands motioned Silphine away, and Granny was left alone with the lawyer.

"How 's Sara been using you lately?" she began; "been Joshua-ing again? It just shows your conceit for you to be fancying she 'd think of her Joshua in the New Jerusalem."

"Her jealousy was equal to anything," he answered sulkily; "but you 've got something particular to say to me, I 've heard."

"It 's just this. I 've heard more than they think for about Cornelius. He 's in Pentecost's hands, and Silphine 's put the last nail in his coffin, is n't that the way of it?"

"I 'm afraid it is."

"Now, you know and I know how I 've left my money to him, all except what comes to Silphine from her father, and that is n't much. I could n't rest quiet in my grave if I thought it would n't save him from bank-

ruptcy. A Rosdew in the courts, it 's as bad as a Rosdew in jail. It 'll save him, that money, won't it ? "

The money of which she spoke had all gone in a bank failure, but she had never been able to realise the fact.

" Of course, of course," he said hurriedly; " it 'll be more than enough. Set your mind quite at ease on that point."

" There now, I 'm ready for Pentecost. I 'll give him a talking to: it 'll quite bring back old times to him. Don't you go," said she, as Mr. Juliff rose to take his leave. He had a strong British objection to scenes, having been only too familiar with them during the lifetime of the departed Sara. However, he relapsed into his chair as Mr. Pentecost entered.

" Seems quite like old times," said Granny to him, " when you came courting me and I — sent you to the right-about. Only now I 'm coffin-ripe, and you 'll have to be thinking of your latter end before the teething child 's husband high."

" You did n't send for me to tell me that," said he, rubbing an ill-razored chin in a manner that set Gran's teeth on edge.

" You might have had better luck with the maidens," said she, paying no heed to his remark, " if you had been a bit readier with the razor. I never could bring myself to kiss a stubble-field."

" I don't call to mind that I asked you very often."

" But I 'm sorrier for you than most women would be. I was always brainier than the rest of them. Give them

tiddlewinks of satisfaction, and they 're happier than bees in clover; but you always wanted to cut a dash with your family. You wanted a Rosdew when you were young, and you want a Rosdew now you 're old, and you can't compass it. I tell you I 'm sorry for you; I know what a big desire 's like."

Granny was wont to explain proudly to strangers how, having begun life as Selina Rosdew, the maiden, she had become a Rosdew once more on her marriage with a cousin, after two previous experiments in matrimony.

"And I don't want your pity. I shall have something a deal more satisfying than that, I reckon. I 'm not one to stand being trifled with," said Mr. Pentecost.

Here Mr. Juliff's face tried to express volumes, as he edged his chair back from Gran's glance and looked at Mr. Pentecost in an expostulating way. But Gran caught his look, and turning to him said sharply, —

"If it 's colic that 's troubling you, Turkey rhubarb 's the best thing."

"Oh, nothing, nothing," he said deprecatingly.

"You 're going to set to on Cornelius," she said, returning to the subject in hand, "but you won't catch him that way."

"We 'll see," said Mr. Pentecost, rising. The look of exultation on Mrs. Rosdew's face was very repulsive to him, but a consciousness of the reality of his power gave him strength to resist his inclinations.

"I only told you this as a warning," said Gran; "it 's

ill finding an addled galeeny's egg when you looked for a sound hen's egg, and you 'll find that Cornelius in the courts will be but an addled egg to you."

"I 'll see to that," he retorted grimly.

"Death 's like bloaters," said Gran that night; "there 's hard roes and soft roes, and no middle ones. I reckon I 'm going in for a soft one."

The heat suddenly broke two days later, and a wild northwester blew, swaying the thick summer foliage and driving the cloud-rack leaping over the moon in battalions like fierce jungle beasts advancing on their prey. Behind Silphine was the dark summer-house, half buried in tree branches, where she still saw in fancy the face of death. Gran had had the death she desired: no straw death hers, but one among the freshness of the outdoors, where she had insisted on their carrying her, with the restlessness of coming change upon her. She had been left alone for five minutes, and Silphine had found her gone when she returned from her errand to the house. Now the wind was making all things new, till the cloud-rack flying above seemed like the team of passionate desires that had driven the dead woman.

With the speed of a sudden resolve Silphine entered the summer-house; as she set a match to her taper tremors shook her, but there was no face there in the circle of darkness, as she half feared there would be. The light in her hand flared up, and a voice on the other side of the hedge began to sing softly the rollicking lines of "Widdicombe Fair": it seemed a desecration to Silphine,

though the singer had no notion of heartlessness; every one was busy with their own affairs, and Gran had held so close to life, which had already forgotten her. Silphine hastily wrote, in protest, lest she seem like all the rest, a letter of good-bye; the slithering of the tough laurel leaves against one another ran little thrills through her blood.

"I can't see you. Gran died this morning. Please go away without trying to see me. I don't know why I write this, but I must. Perhaps if you had come before, when I was in trouble, I might have wanted you. Perhaps if we were more like lovers now, I might want you; I cannot tell. I can't be what I thought I could to you. Maybe I never shall; maybe I shall learn, but I must learn alone. You would stifle me till I have tried myself. I must see life, now that I have seen death. Go away, and good-bye."

Half an hour later this was handed to John Saxon at the inn. He read it at first with a distinct sense of relief; but he believed, rightly enough, that the memory of their last meeting had influenced the writer more than Gran's death. He hesitated, however, for a moment as to whether he should obey or not; he was going away to London next day, and this would be their last chance of meeting. Yet he had dreaded her spell over him, so that he had put off coming to her again and again; still, the woman of the note was not the woodland creature whom he feared and whom — he could not forget. Deliberately, paying tribute to the old Adam within, he walked down the lane to the cottage beside the trees;

the moon was clearer now, and the long sweeps of still light which men called of old the twilight of the gods lay over the meadows. So the artist in sensation worshipped at the shrine of the goddess whom he despised, the shrine labelled *hominum divomque voluptas, alma Venus;* and big-eyed, black-circled, heavy-lidded, the woman waited by her dead.

A month later Mr. Pentecost put in action the bills of sale; and Mr. Rosdew, Genefer, and Silphine moved to a four-roomed cottage.

Chapter X

Rosemary comes in

IT was an evening in harvest time when, as the night laid her purple, wine-dark shadows over hill and field, men's hearts grew glad at the cool oncoming of the radiant summer night after the burden of the sun's mighty force. Sunburnt faces grew less weary as the breeze sprang up on the going down of the sun, a breeze that, as the faint moon-crescent rose beside the throbbing glory of the star-depths, seemed like the breathing of a great weary sleeper watched over by the friendly light from less o'er-laboured worlds.

This was Rosemary's first night at 'Light and Come In, and after supper Nix brought her out to get a breath of the cool breeze. As they stood in the yard with the twinkling lights from the mullioned windows behind them and the throbbing lights above, a pulse of thankfulness swung through Nix's anxious heart, for Rosemary was pleased, and had been like a happy child all day with a new toy. The weather-worn old place had responded bravely to all the attentions paid to it by Genefer and himself, though the chapel was still partly stable, partly storehouse, and though the newly sown bowling-green looked sparse as to grass-blades. The dreaded arrival

of this dainty soul for which he was answerable was happily over; Rosemary was rapidly coming to absorb the work of two or three toilers in her service. The new front door had especially pleased her, though of course no one would ever enter the house by any other way than by the porch which passed the dairy; still, she could never have borne the thought that possible callers should pass through the farm kitchen. Rosemary, as Genefer had expected, made the most of Sir Walter Raleigh; the courtly Elizabethan shadow made the farmhouse atmosphere give place to a more rarefied ether, where lingering echoes of fashionable life still lived.

As the two stood close to the gateway by the stable, the quiet breathing of the horses could be clearly heard; suddenly one blew noisily over his feed of corn to get rid of the husks. It was a pleasant sound, suggestive to the ease-loving nature of Rosemary of the patient, hard-working beast's joy in the good things that he helped the kindly mother to produce. Rosemary loved dainties, too, and she felt the thrill of the pleasant time to which she was looking forward; she gave a snuggle of joy in Nix's encircling arm.

"Happy, dearest?" he asked with a throb of joy on his own part.

"Isn't it lovely that we're not dead, but all full of life? Isn't it, Nix? and with long summer days before us to be happy in? Come out under the trees and listen to the leaves moving in the wind."

The two figures seemed, as they moved down the road, to be part of the nature around them; his tweed and her white frock offered no black contrast to the nature-world, as human clothes too often do. But the human butterfly dreads the time when there shall be no more flowers; the fears that lie so close to humanity, the dread penalty paid for vivid consciousness, found their way to the surface. The secret inner weakness in Rosemary spoke out, as it had not done before to Nix.

"I fear pain and I hate cold so much, Nix. If I cut myself ever so little, such a shiver goes to my heart. Mother was the same, I remember, though she died when I was quite small."

"Dearest, you are not well to-night, surely?"

"But those things will be, you know, Nix."

"Never for you if I can help it. Don't let 's talk about pain and cold, time enough for that forty years hence."

"All right, dear boy. There was a shiver in the air just then, or you may be sure I should never have thought of such things."

Nix recalled this conversation afterwards as his writing on the wall, his soothsayer's prediction. There was a silence, save for their footfalls and the flutter of the leaves.

"We save the first field to-morrow," said Nix, returning to the every-day.

"You have had a dreadful time of work, have n't

you? The new door, the house, the corn, the apples," said Rosemary, marking the items off on her fingers.

"Well, I did n't build the new door, the apples did their own growing, and Genefer looked after the house. You should have seen the work she did, — salting pork, laying down carpets, painting rails."

"And worrying everybody. She 's getting bald on the top of her head with fuss."

"That 's what the working bees who do all the toil of the hive get, too," said Nix, in an instructive voice; his one intellectual pursuit was natural history; his calm, level nature made him a good observer of minute processes. "You 're not grateful enough to Genefer; she 's been the making of us in every way. You should never forget that."

"Oh, she likes bustle, just as I like ease; that 's all the difference between us."

"Did the old man take the change hard?" said Nix, to change the subject. All the weeks of Nix's efforts at the farm Rosemary had been staying at Widdicombe, so that she had not escaped the unpleasantness of social change; it was the chastening effect of this experience of bankruptcy that had clothed 'Light and Come In with rosy hues.

"Oh, I believe he was glad to have it over and to live in a pokey cottage. He took it worse about Genefer insisting on marrying Isaac. Of course, that 's silly, for a schoolmaster 's as good as a poor parson any day, though he does call his school an academy."

"And so she's going to cook and dust for Isaac and make a Paradise for that empty-headed wind-bag," said Nix, resentfully.

"He's got four new boys, and every new one makes him strut more than ever. She'll manage the school before very long."

"Then it'll be the best-managed school in the county," said Nix, fervently.

"That's as it may be," said Rosemary, a trifle resentfully. "I had such an adventure this afternoon. Two ladies called and were shown into the drawing-room."

"Through the new door?"

"Be quiet. You put me out. They were sitting up very stiff and straight when I went in, but I thought it was very kind of them to call on me so soon, so I was throwing all the sweetness of which your wife is capable into my talk when — an earthquake happened."

"It must have been a small one, for I was in the Four Acres and never noticed it."

"You're deaf sometimes, that's why. Well, I could scarcely believe my ears when I heard the old one saying —

"'We came to know if you could oblige us with a couple of fowls.'

"'I don't quite understand,' I said, drawing myself up.

"'Oh,' said she, a little flurried, 'you see, we're lodging near here, and we can't get poultry in the village

for love or money, but were told we could get them here.'

"'I am afraid you have been misinformed,' said I, going towards the bell.

"'But don't you sell fowls?' she said, getting up too. 'I 'm sure I saw plenty running about.'

"'Not in my drawing-room, I believe, madam,' said I; 'the kitchen-door is the place for such inquiries.' I rang the bell for Sally in a lordly manner, because it looked well, but of course she never came. However, I showed them out of the new door," finished Rosemary, with a toss of her head. "Did you ever hear of such impertinence? I shall have to teach the neighbourhood my proper position."

"Of course it was unpleasant for you, but I think you did quite right," said Nix, compassionately.

"Of course I did. I always know the right thing to do. Do we sell fowls?"

"Yes," laughed Nix; "we send them to market with butter and eggs. But Mrs. Sandover sees to all that. That 's why she 's here,—to save you bother."

"I hate that woman, with her corkscrew curls hanging round her head like bell-ropes. I know I shall pull them all, one after the other, some day."

"Don't, dearest," said Nix, much alarmed at the prospect; "she 's such a good butter-maker, and she knows all about fowls. We couldn't possibly get on without her. Do be careful. But about that pair of fowls: you know I buy and sell and go to market."

"Oh, you're a man, and, besides, you don't go to market with a basket on each arm."

"The pater would have sold them a couple like a shot. Dad likes driving a bargain."

Rosemary was silent: she had formed her own opinions about the elder Mr. Calmady; his reception of her had not been exactly cordial.

"Do you know," said Nix, as they re-entered the yard and stood looking down on the meadows and orchards where Nix's hopes lay,—"do you know that I'm going to have a pupil?"

"A pupil! why, I thought you were only learning yourself."

"Well, he's going to learn with me, then. He'll lodge somewhere near, and make mistakes with me. Anyway, he'll be another hand without wages, and he's got the build of a navvy. Besides, I could n't refuse him work with me for a month or two; he's done me a good turn before now."

"How did you know him?"

"Knocked up against him in Plymouth in the days before I went to Widdicombe and met you. Repath, that's his name, was a bit of a scallawag then; but he's been everything in turn, and he was always all things to all men."

"And to all women?"

"Perhaps. I don't know. He came a cropper somehow, I believe; but he says touching Mother Earth brings new life, so I suppose he's all the better for the cropper.

He writes about the colonies and wide, clean spaces. A man must be hard hit to talk like that," said simple Nix, who preferred the obvious. "He was always a bit full of notions, and a man 's bad when he talks of clean spaces. However, I could n't refuse a man down on his luck."

There was a certain anxiety about Nix's tone that left Rosemary in rather a mystified condition.

"He won't live with us, will he?" she asked in cheerful tones; another man would be a distinct acquisition.

"Oh, dear, no."

"Then don't let 's bother about him," said Rosemary, leading the way into the house, and looking back with the Greuze-like turn of the head which she affected.

"No, don't let 's," said Nix, obediently.

As they passed through the front kitchen, Mrs. Sandover, who, with Sally as drudge, formed the working staff of the indoor department, was jerking angry stitches through the thick "apern" which she was hemming. Sally had already been sent to bed; and Zeb, the old labourer who lived in the house, was just considering the advisability of moving his weary carcass in the same direction.

A little pinched-up woman was Mrs. Sandover, with a tight screw of back hair that revealed the whole shape of her skull. She was a woman with a past in the shape of a convict husband who might at some future time come within the category of unpleasant realities.

"A cat-faced puss that," she said with a nod in the

direction of the door through which Nix and Rosemary had passed.

"A rare bit o' woman's flaish, I call it," said Zeb, "as might make a man's mouth water."

"Pig-flaish and cheek o' baccon be more in your line, Zeb, an old galoony with foot and a half turned gravewards. What the galleys the Almighty meant by making them flaunting toads, it passes my wit to say."

"To take off from the uncommon oogliness of t' others, I reckon," said Zeb, not without immediate intent in his remark, "same as you puts boiled pudden on table side o' fat baccon. That 's about the size of it."

"'T is enough to make a decent body turn to see the ways of her," said Mrs. Sandover, paying no heed to Zeb's personalities, "more like a light o' love with her fancy man than a decent sober wife and man, — hugging and kissing and sitting on his knee. I declare, though Sally 's a slut, her 's a decent maid enough, and I 'll never let her into the parlour when they two 'm about in it: teach her bad ways, that will, to see they two."

"What you call bad for the morails?" said Zeb, with a leer. "Iss; 't is the best thing you can do, to see to all parlour work yourself. Your morails 'll do no harm, and then there 's no call for 'ee to glue your eyes and ears to kay-hole. Save 'ee a mort o' trouble, that will, I 'll warn."

"A cheeld or two to her coat-tails 'll tame her down, I reckon," said Mrs. Sandover, with a withering glance;

"and wanting her breakfast, too, when everybody else's inside is calling out for dinner."

"Iss; they 'm naish and dilicate, that sort, like new-cast calves all their days," said Zeb, feelingly. "A man 's pretty nigh feared to touch 'em first along, but a picks it up, a picks it up, the handling of 'em. Maister 'll find it a pretty long furrow that 's afore him, that a will, afore all 's said and done."

"A mort o' knowledge o' they trade you 've got, Zeb, for a widow-man of forty years' standing. I doubt if it was all come by lawful," said Mrs. Sandover, with an air of propriety, as she began to fold up her work, with a glance at the brass clock-face gleaming in the candle-light. "Such hours I never saw kept before in any decent house, but that was the same afore her come. Maister 's like an emmet that 's got lost of a night."

"Ah, 't was but a widowed bed, as you mid say, and that 's wearing to man and maid alike, as I ought to know," said Zeb, mournfully, as he slouched towards the back staircase with his candle "dip" held in a drooping and despondent hand.

"You 're a hosebird, Zeb," said Mrs. Sandover, severely, "to talk o' widowed beds and that, when your mind ought to be running on your laying out."

"'T is n't a 'ticing sort o' subject, Sandy," said Zeb, "for when you comes where I be you looks back'ards, rather than forewards, I can tell 'ee."

"And you seem to have a deal more to look backward on," said she, calling after him as he wavered along

the bare wood of the passage, "than by good right you ought to."

"Iss, iss; a man minds the cheerful carryings-on of his young days when a comes where I be."

"A slammocking old galoony," commented Mrs. Sandover.

Chapter XI

Giant Forces

THE red dawn-lights were flashing through the shattered eastern window of the chapel at 'Light and Come In, till the scattered fleeces laid there were dipped in colour for a second as though the sunlight shone once more through emblazoned window-panes, then the glory faded as the cloud-shadows chased one another across the grass of the eastern meadows looking towards the moors. Westwards, under Rosemary's window, the night shadows lingered in the grass where the heavy dew still lay in the shadow of the grey walls. Outside the shadow the solid masses of sunlight told of the rebirth that comes with the rest of night.

The damp air struck cold to one just roused from the nestling warmth of sleep; but Rosemary never heeded it as she lay crouched on the cushioned window-seat with face sideways on her arm, thrown just inside the sill of the wide-open window. The clear light made the dark eyes gleam gem-like from the pallor of her dead-white skin; the rippling masses of burnished hair wrapped her neck and breast from the breeze. She was alone in the

room, as one knew from the inward lookof her whole expression.

It is not fear that speaks in a child's face before the fiat of a strength that it cannot overcome, that it knows to be resistless; yet the power to defy and the power to fear are both there. That look gleamed in Rosemary's eyes; she flung herself madly, uselessly, against the forces of life that she knew to be resistless and she believed to be cruel. A wave of hysteric passion shook her suddenly: had there been any spectator present to be hurt by the sound she would have screamed; as it was, she lay still, and the fit passed with only a catching breath to show that it had ever been. Weariness, ugliness, pain, perhaps death: she seemed to herself to question them all as they passed before her eyes in shameful procession, like shapes from some nether world all covered up from the light of day. The tiny heart that Nature's great force had seized in her grip fluttered and sickened like a bird in a boy's hand. In that future in whose service all our highest work is done even now, surely the burden of maternity will never be laid on the Faint-Hearts, were it only in the cause of the new generation itself. In that splendid organising of human affairs towards which we have made the first tottering steps, we shall at least ask that the portress of the gates of life shall be strong-souled, unfaltering to bear gladly the labour for the sake of the future. In these matters we shall ask strength rather than beauty, joy in life and in the coming of it, rather than mere grace. Only a

heritage of ancestral fear could be the lot of Rosemary's child since the first faint promise of its life she hailed with such deadly fear: the possession of the splendid outward attributes of sex-charm imply no necessary fitness for the function those attributes would seem to imply.

Suddenly the door was flung open with a jar that grated on Rosemary's bare nerves, and Mrs. Sandover entered, carrying a breakfast tray. The sight of the woman's ugly face, combined with her sudden entrance, struck Rosemary as a blow might have done. She started to her feet with a cry and bade the woman leave the room; the sound of her own voice startled her as a hideous echo. What she said she could not have told, but the words sounded to her excited senses like an oath. Mrs. Sandover left the room with a muttered threat of instant departure from the house, and Rosemary was left alone to her fears.

When Nix came back that morning from his round, he received a month's notice from the housekeeper, "which it would be to-day if it were n't that I 've got a heart to feel for 'ee." From Rosemary herself he could get nothing but listless replies that told nothing; in some form or other it was evident that the Eumenides had crossed his threshold.

Nix had one resource for all his troubles: he sent a pressing invitation to Genefer to spend the next Sunday at the farm. That energetic lady allowed herself and Isaac an occasional outing, but not on a week-day. The

boarders could be kept from black deeds of daring by Silphine's efforts on a Sunday, especially when three solid hours of it were spent in church. Sunday loomed before Nix as a haven to be desired, when, try as he would, he could get from Rosemary only cold words and from Mrs. Sandover very hot ones which told nothing. A certain air of perplexity on Nix's countenance dated from this period.

Sunday brought blazing sunlight that made Rosemary refuse to move from the cool west room even to go and meet Genefer, whose arrival gave Nix the first feeling of relaxed ease that he had experienced for days.

"Let me see her alone," said Genefer, "while you and Isaac do a little farming. Oh, yes, I'll be gentle enough. I'm not a grizzly that's had no meat for a fortnight."

Mr. Poppy and Nix accordingly did a little farming; that is, Nix played the part of showman of the improvements he had introduced, and Mr. Poppy criticised freely and discursively. It was to be noted that Mr. Poppy's tongue ran on oiled wheels and his flood of information was unceasing in the absence of Genefer; in her presence he spoke diffidently, even on his own subject,—school-keeping,—as if a tyro in the presence of an expert.

"Yes," he said, in answer to Nix's inquiries; "the school's thriving uncommonly. Genefer's made several neat little suggestions as to methods and curriculum which I have quite seen my way to carrying out. Of

course they had to be modified to suit the requirements of the school world, but it is astonishing how Genefer has adapted her mind to that world."

"Genefer's made to adapt her mind to anything practical, I believe," said Nix, admiringly.

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Poppy, in the tone of an examiner speaking of a promising pupil; "she really does remarkably well, though there is, as is usual in starting a race, a little too much anxiety to put on the pace, to speak metaphorically."

Mr. Poppy was, no doubt, thinking regretfully of the short morning hours of repose that he now enjoyed; it might be even of the grog of which he found himself deprived on every night except Saturday. Mr. Poppy felt very sore about the grog; it had never been anything but a weak decoction, and he had thoroughly enjoyed it after the wicked had ceased from troubling; that is, after the boys were in bed. He would have been still more disturbed had he known that the money so saved by Genefer had gone to buy a new hat for Rosemary, who had really been very good in not making more fuss about the Rosdew discomforts; so does Heaven temper the wind to the shorn lamb that grumbles enough. Besides, Isaac stood in no need of small gratifications since he had the great reward of Genefer herself. Like most bustling folk she gauged her own value, in some respects, at a high figure.

Mr. Poppy had admired the cider-pound, tried to count the fowls, and prodded the pigs several times before

Genefer appeared again in the yard. The time seemed agelong to Nix, who could almost have contemplated with pleasure the sight of Isaac's comfortable person immersed in the great cider-barrel he had been tapping with such gusto.

"Now then," said Genefer, in the tone of authority which had grown upon her during her short scholastic career, "you go, Isaac, and sit down in the shade. I've got to talk business with Nix, and I know you're as sleepy as an owl."

There was a softened look in Genefer's eyes which sent Nix's spirits down to zero. Rage in her expression just then would have made him feel comparatively at ease.

"Well, my boy," she said, leading the way out of the yard and under the trees of the lane, "well, you've got a stiff climb before you, but I don't fear your winning through. You see," all Genefer's sex loyalty was up in arms, "she isn't just like other women. She's a little weak thing, somehow. Why, when we all went tumbling about on the ice, she'd just pity herself for days over a bruise that nobody else would have noticed. I reckon everything hurts her more than it does us."

"What is it?" said Nix, in a low tone.

"Oh, just a little falling star, as the children say, coming to 'Light and Come In; that's all. She's afraid, terribly afraid, of what she'll have to suffer."

Nix was silent; as he walked on, the simple fellow

felt the pulsing sunlight that beat against the surging blood in his face to be but the beat of the waves of awe that surge round the every-day of common human things.

"Now," said Genefer, after a pause, "you must look out for trying times, but you must be patient. She hates herself and she 'll hate everybody, but you must n't be harsh to her."

"How dare you, Genefer?" he turned on her savagely.

"Oh, yes, yes, I know what you feel; but she 'd madden a graven image in some of the moods she 'll be in, I can tell you. She may be unnatural or anything you like, but you must n't gauge her by what you think you know of other women."

"I don't; of course I don't."

"No, no; of course not. Anyway, you 'd better get rid of the Sandover woman."

"Then who is to make the butter and look after things?"

"Have Silphine up for the next month, and let her learn before the woman leaves."

"But she helps in the school."

"Oh, she 's no great shakes there. She moons about and lets 'em stick pins in one another's legs instead of doing their sums."

"Then what 's the good of her trying to do dairy-work?" groaned Nix.

"Oh, that 's quite another thing. School-teaching

does n't give one a second for dreaming; every other sort of work does."

"Besides," protested Nix, "I 've got Repath coming here to work for a month or two, and I can't put him off now."

"Well, and what harm will he do? He is n't a savage, is he?"

"No," said Nix, rather doubtfully; "and he won't come in the house much."

"Of course not; and what if he does? Don't you go putting up bricks to tumble over when the place is black with boulders of difficulties already. He won't hurt Silphine or Rosemary; and if he runs off with Silphine, I for one should n't care. Don't you set up for a matchmaker or a novelist; it does n't suit you."

"Besides," put in Nix, in the tone of one willing to be comforted, "Silphine 's engaged, is n't she?"

"Oh, as to that, it 's all dreams with Silphine. She 's set up an image of John Saxon and fancies she 's in love with it — and was really quite relieved when he went away."

"Poor Saxon!"

"Just so, and poor Silphine. There 'll be a cropper or two come in that quarter; I 'll take my solemn Bible oath as to it. But, there, you 've got Rosemary to run, and that 's about enough for any one man."

"I should feel a weight gone from me if she would only come."

"Oh, she 'll come, and I 'll get a pupil-teacher; that 'll

come really cheaper, too. I suppose Repath 's a shady one, and that 's why you 're bothering about him."

"I don't really know; he 's a bit deep for me."

"Oh, a new man always flutters the dovecots of the women, but I 'm not sure that they are n't all the better for it. Now, don't you bother over-much about Rosemary. She 'll hate everybody in turn, that 's the form her thoughts will take, because she 'd like to slap the universe and can't. Don't you believe in her hates over-much; it 's illness with her."

"Poor darling," said Nix.

"All right. You keep to that, and you 'll get on swimmingly," said Genefer, encouragingly. "I 'll send Silphine up by the end of next week,—sooner if I can."

"But you 'll have to consult Isaac, I suppose."

"Oh, he 'll jump my way all right. He does n't sit on the fence when I 've got over it."

He did not on this occasion, for Silphine arrived at the end of the week.

Chapter XII

A Conflagration

THE whir of the grasshoppers' wings all round her, the myriad whisper of the insect hum, and the shimmer of the heat haze that quivered over the lines of "pooks" in the great wheat-field at the lower end of which the men were working, all faded together into a languorous dream in Silphine's brain, as she lay back against the nest of sheaves she had built for herself and Rosemary earlier in the day. The two had been diligently carrying out Genefer's prescription for Rosemary of living outdoors for hours every day: *sub divo* was that sage's remedy for almost all the ills of mind and body. Just now Silphine was alone; slowly her drowsy head slipped back, and with this involuntary movement the last waking vision came, — one of the same field as she had seen it two days ago. Over again she saw the ever-narrowing square of tossing, prideful heads of golden grain, the flaunting vanity of poppies with the sun gleaming red through their blood-veined petals. The ring of men and dogs gathered nearer round the pitifully narrow refuge of the rabbits and field-mice. The agony of the tiny hearts, whose throbbing shook the quivering, furry

bodies, caused her a wakeful pang for a moment; then she slept with only the insect hum in the back of her brain. The work of the dairy now began early, almost before dawn, and the day's long out-of-door hours brought with them a richness of life that heightened the ease and zest of bodily joys, and sent the mind to sleep. The air of the upland in this season of heat and fruitfulness was electric with bodily life and vigour, till thought seemed a disease; sorrow, and more especially sorrow for sin, an impertinence. Rosemary, too, seemed to be learning, for the time at any rate, something of Silphine's delight in the mere drawing of breath.

At the end of the field the work-people soon gathered into a group round the drinkings which had been brought out to them, but one figure detached itself from the others and came towards the sleeper. It was Repath, who had hung his coat on the higher hedge and now came to look for it before leaving the field. He was searching for the spot where he had laid it, when his eyes fell on Silphine in her nest of corn-sheaves.

In the veil which falls over the mind with the dropping of the eyelids, in the smoothing of the lines of thought, the body's glory is given full power to speak; this seemed scarcely a beautiful woman to the watcher, but more truly a grand one. Repath had noticed neither of Nix's women-folk before, because the type to which Rosemary belonged seemed too familiar, and that of Silphine too strange. Rosemary, indeed, he hated instinctively, but as he looked down on the lithe power of the dreamer, a

sudden perception of health seized him; clean and pure and whole, the child of the open air, she seemed, a true mate for the man who would live with nature. The strength of the brown earth was in her hair, the power of a field-worker in the strong limbs, the sun's kiss in the tan of her cheeks. Leaning slightly nearer to the column of throat which was shown by the collarless blouse which she always wore, he could see the texture of the skin, not velvety, but smooth, like nothing but skin. He hated velvet touches, and at the thought a shiver ran through him; the sudden perception of life in this body he had at first regarded as a marble form, came to him with the sight of a pulse that beat in her throat. The low, even breathing and the throbbing muscle flung little jarring chords of life through all the pulses of his blood.

Suddenly he drew back, for her quivering eyelids warned him of the coming of consciousness. Starting up from her nest, her coil of hair, glinted with red, fell to her waist, and, as Repath stood a little way behind, the smooth child-contour of her head gave him a sense of the woman-weakness which appealed to the man in him as the sleeping strength of bodily perfection had not done. Flaming lights chased one another over her face and showed through the tan as she saw who stood by her. She flung up both hands to fasten the straying hair.

"Ah," he said regretfully, "I never meant to waken you."

"I half knew there was someone there," she said without looking at him.

There was a shy consciousness about them both as if, in ways unknown, a revelation had been made. She felt it even in the long afternoon shadows that lay now in swathes of peace over the rows of pooks. He could feel that she was trembling as he helped her to rise to her feet.

It was a relief to hear Nix's voice calling them both by name. A sense as of a spell suddenly broken made Silphine give a sigh of relief; it had been pain while it lasted, — this quiver that shook her at the sudden awakening. She had never felt the constraining power of another personality in that way before. She shook the feeling off as she ran upstairs to her room, but it came again like a faint echo as their hands touched or their eyes met at the meal which followed.. It was with the joy of one who feels an ordeal over that Silphine watched his broad-shouldered figure swing off to the field again.

The harvest moon waned, the hunter's moon waxed, and the clear, cold nights made the granite landmarks stand out against the sky-line as they had done for ages in these lonely spots. The winter began to give its warning, and the late moorland farmers hurried to finish their harvest lest the cold should catch them with their corn unsaved. Into the night they worked, while the nuts in the hedges gave out in the coolness their pungent scent. The cold on the uplands round 'Light and Come In seemed to press with cruel force on Rosemary's

discontent, and now that she could no longer spend the livelong day in the sunshine her querulous spirit began to rule the house. The heaviest burden of it fell on Silphine, for his work called Nix away from the sound of the complaining voice which had kept his father of late from even entering the porch. But there came a less busy time when the harvest was over and the cider-making had not begun, and then Nix began to know the feel of the chains he had put on himself. Repath, as one result of Nix's discomforts, began more often at odd times to frequent the house, especially now that he talked of leaving again in the spring. At the thought of the gap his absence would make, at the thought of the constraint his presence put on Rosemary's tempers, Nix felt himself at his stiff climb.

One night in October after supper the two men were sitting on the settle near the open fire in the hall. The moonlight was gleaming through the leaded panes with a calm that defied the leaping flames which started up from the logs as Nix kicked them into a blaze.

As Repath leant forward to knock the ashes out of his pipe, Nix thought how little he knew of the quiet, self-contained man with whom he had worked for so many weeks. The power of Repath's massive form was further emphasised by the unlined, square-cut shape of the homespun garments that he wore with their "patch" pockets and general air of homely usefulness. The clean-shaven face hid no tell-tale sign of character; the fleshy chin, the full lips, were of the type sometimes

seen on the faces of the Roman emperors, with all the sensuousness and a little of the cruelty that such lips express, but the domed forehead where the hair was getting thin might have belonged to a mere dreamer. The eyes, of the modern grey-green colour, corroborated the testimony of neither lips nor forehead. A complex, modern face it was, of which it could only be foretold that this man would love strongly many things beloved of both ancient and modern man — and that the taste of them would be consciously and analytically sweet to him. Though he could not have been much over thirty, the crows' feet were gathering round the deep-set eyes. It was not at all the face of a ne'er-do-well, thought Nix, and yet why was he, at an age when most men have chosen a career, now just setting out to seek one?

Silphine, herself unseen, stood watching the two from the door. She had just seen Rosemary safely abed, and now she waited her opportunity to slip noiselessly through the room and out of the house; the back-door was locked, and she had an errand which she was unwilling to leave till the next morning at a cottage of one of the labourers. She wished neither of the men to see her go, since Nix was tired, as she knew, and so, she hoped, was Repath.

"Yes," she heard Nix say, "it's a boy-and-girl affair almost, though he's the most unboylike creature you could imagine. Don't suppose it will come to anything."

"One loves a good many women in wrong ways before one learns the right way, but she isn't one of the women who ought to be practised on," said Repath.

There was a vibrant quality in his voice that was violin-like and sent Silphine's hand quickly to her belt, where was the one letter she had received from John Saxon since his departure from Widdicombe and which latterly she carried as a talisman; unfortunately the tone of it was scarcely talismanic.

"No," said Nix, sleepily; "I suppose not." The long day's hard toil took more effect on him than on his stronger companion.

Suddenly Repath turned and said quietly, as Silphine began stealthily to move across the flags of the kitchen, "Are you going out — with a basket? Then let me come with you."

"I don't want you," she said, passing quickly down the passage.

"But I want to come," said he; that settled the matter.

The depths of stellar space were lit up in their vastness by the moon till the earth felt lonely for the want of her companion planets. Blue-black depths, with the lights showing vast cold wastes, girt round the old lonely human star. The vastness seemed to lay chill hands on the passion of hot hearts, but only for a moment: the girdling mysteries of the universe only serve to kindle higher the fire of human longing.

"Ah," said Repath, as their footsteps led them under the shadows of the branches that made a mosaic of the road they trod, "how clean the air feels to-night, as if you and I were the only ones to breathe it, — the first ones and the only ones."

There was a ring of fierce desire in his voice that sank to a whisper on the last words. "'T is life's way," he went on: "over and over again she uses the atoms that make up the blood and the heart-strings; and yet 't is all new each time she uses them."

"I like to think it," said Silphine, quietly. "I used not to; I wanted all new."

"And I hate it; they take to the old paths with such cursed ease, these old atoms of ours."

There was an oppression in his manner that Silphine feared more than the passion she divined. She could not answer, for her heart testified to the truth of his words.

"Ye gods," he said slowly, "give me a land where the very worms have n't battened on corpses. I hate your old houses, your old, old soil that is made of the dust of men. I want a new land where they did n't plant those who survived Agincourt."

"I don't mind. It 's good to be alive, even if we are but old things over again."

"Ay, it 's good to be alive, to snatch out our bit of hot joy from the eternal bonfire," he said slowly, looking down at her upturned face with eyes that held her life quivering in the force of his; "do you know how good, you woman with all life's longing in you?"

"You know I do," she answered with white lips that quivered, and with his will, not hers. She felt saved, from what she knew not, when the walls of the cottage she was bound for came in sight.

"There 's a woman there," she said with forced com-

posure, "who 's dying slowly, — a young woman; she 's always been starved of the good things of life, and now she 's going where she can't get a chance of them any more."

"But," he said fiercely, "the world 's packed with the starving. I myself have always wanted more of everything, — more strength, more power, more love. You know what I mean."

He stood in her way, with one of her hands laid on his shoulder as if he would quiet something there.

"I know very well, but — "

"Yes, there is a but," he said to himself.

"You know very well there is," she answered, looking for the first time straight at him.

"The only thing, if you don't acquiesce in the starvation, is to go on and take," said he, with a shrug at his own inward protest.

"Will you do one thing that I ask?" she said.

"You know what power you have over me."

"Will you go now and let me walk back alone? I pray you, do this one thing for me." She felt her self-mastery, such as it was, to be leaving her.

She walked back alone, and John Saxon thought when he read the next letter from her, that he had never known before how much she cared for him. When he read her oft-repeated, "I want you, I want you," he thought fatuously of the womanly reserve that covered so much fire; he was not the first man to warm his hands at the flame another has kindled.

Nix, meanwhile, was starting a new undertaking, which was to fill the empty coffers of the Calmady family; he was on the way to become a cider-maker.

The huge granary at 'Light and Come In was vast enough to stable all the king's horses. High up in the roof, amid the blackened, worm-eaten cross-beams, massive, cobwebbed with bat-like festoons that swayed in the misty dawn wind, shafts of light found a way through the yawning holes in the forest of timber. Cross-lights shot to and fro; and the floor far away, down below the rough stone walls, knee-deep in billowy straw, showed yellow arms which seemed to be flung up here and there from the straw bed. Gradually the light reached a black press,—a thing of moving levers that stood near the doorway which opened into the yard. It was the new cider-pound that proclaimed itself, in the midst of mediæval walls and roof, as a thing of yesterday. The water-wheel, affixed to the outer wall of the barn, stood with hungry teeth waiting for the motive-force to be applied. Inside the wall by the wheel was built the loft from which the apples fell to be pressed into a compact mass before being actually placed in the press where the juice was to be extracted.

The water-wheel, the pound, and the loft were all new, for, although the farm was rich in orchard land, and year after year the yellow masses lay in the autumn mists at the foot of bare-stripped trees, yet for the first time the vintage work was to be carried out at 'Light and Come In. The labour-saving of cartage to another

pound was to compensate for the outlay in new plant. Indeed, Nix hoped to make the farm the centre for the cider-making of the immediate neighbourhood. The water-wheel and the utilisation of the water-power gave satisfaction to him every time he considered the matter, especially remembering the melancholy spectacle he had so often seen of an old horse, hour after hour circling in the weary treadmill, till, when taken out of the traces, it would still, from force of habit, continue to pace round, having "gone mazed." There would be no weary old horse here, at any rate, for the hardest work would be done by the water, in which the ducks paddled later on.

A fortnight later the clouds in close-packed masses covered every inch of sky as the dawn crept on; whole battalions, with a dun tinge that showed them up against the pearl-grey background, mustered and drew closer earthward, till the light itself seemed to come, not through the clouds, but from them. Blue-grey distances could be discerned on the horizon as the light grew stronger; and again and again a mist wreath from the valley, blown by a side current, whirled up the yard and was lost in the drier air of the upland.

Silphine stood listening to the rattle of the carts that drove up through the dimness, with the lanterns throwing sickly yellow gleams over cavernous yawns from the carters, or over the bare, shaggy arms of the man who stood up in a cart by the loft pitching his load of apples into the empty recess, whence they would fall on layers

of straw to be pressed by the power of the wheel into a pulpous block called the "mock," itself in turn to be placed in the pound, and slowly, heavily, pressed dry of juice.

From where she stood, as the light grew brighter, she could see the lanterns flicker out and the grey light reign supreme. The faces of the work-folk suddenly looked tired and drawn, and the yellow-tinged apples almost white, while the mist in the valley came in ever-increasing waves between herself and the group of men round the wheel. It was not a butter-making day, and leisure made her want to see more; throwing a shawl over her head, she passed out between the granite posts and across the yard. The little plank bridge echoed under the click of her heels just as she was wishing she had restrained her curiosity, for there were several strangers near the pound.

It was too late, however, for Repath had already turned at the click of a woman's shoe. She saw with him Nix and Mr. Calmady, who had ridden over, early as it was, to see how the new venture worked. A pond of trampled straw and miry ooze occupied the doorway, and as Silphine paused beside it the men drew on one side to let her see the working of the machine. Tiny runnels of juice were streaming in all directions into a trough from the mass of apple-pulp now being pressed slowly into ever-smaller compass by the square iron weight above, the handle of which was being worked by a lad who had hours of toil before him, — toil of a less

joyous kind than that of the vintagers of another land. Beneath the trough the small barrels, or "pound kegs," caught at the corners the sweet yellow streams. A pile of hogsheads lay ready to receive the contents of the "pound kegs," and a sweet, musty smell already hung in the misty air, though fermentation had not yet begun.

Slowly the great weight pressed ever closer on the "mock" that, when dry and flat, would be used to make a blaze in the chilly nights and mornings to come.

"I call that a pleasant sight," said Mr. Calmady, in a tone of great satisfaction.

"It's always pleasant," said Repath, seeing that Nix, standing moodily by with his hands in his pockets, was not going to reply to his father's words, — "it's always pleasant to see the end of a good piece of work."

"End, indeed, this is n't the end, is it, Zeb?"

Zeb was standing, easing his back laboriously as he looked on.

"I reckon not, maister. There's a mort of back-aching yet, what with the racking and the storing, — a mort o' work."

"Well, there's that in most things, Zeb," said Mr. Calmady, cheerfully, considering that the burden of it usually fell on other shoulders than his.

"Iss, a back-aching bit of a world, this, sure 'nuff. But I reckon 't is most nigh breakfast time, ain't it, maister?"

It was, and the group rapidly disappeared.

"Will you stay, father, to breakfast with us?" said Nix, in a perfunctory manner.

"No, no," said Mr. Calmady, hastily; "I must be going now. The lady wife would n't want visitors so early." He was always chary of indoor visits.

"Are n't you coming to see the new wonder nearer?" said Repath, as he stood by Silphine on the spot she had chosen for herself.

"I can't cross that swamp."

"Oh, yes, you can," he said, throwing down a stone or two in the midst of the ooze to form stepping-stones for her. The work-a-day world was all ablaze for him with the joy that he had her, after days of aloofness, all to himself.

"Come," he said gaily, "and see if you can work it."

Silphine placed her two hands on the handle and pressed with all her might. Only a tiny movement resulted; and Repath, before she knew what he was doing, had come behind her and placed his hands on her bare wrists and hands. She could feel his breath on her cheek, and her face grew hot with the blood that leapt to answer the sense of nearness. The lever moved under her hands, caught in his, and she could feel the close coming of his lips, could guess the smooth tenderness of them, and the beating of the eager heart to which she stood so near. The whole gave her the sense of power, of leverage, of matching the means to the end, for which she craved and had craved in vain from John Saxon. Here, too, the mastery seemed in herself, not

outside herself, — the accomplishment of life, in short. It lasted but a moment, for, with a start of decision, she had slipped away and stood back against the side of the old walls, whose roughness she could feel with her hands as she held them out to steady herself.

"No, no," she cried, stretching out repelling hands, which he caught. "No, never."

"For the sake of a dream?" he said hoarsely.

"Yes, for the dream of a truth and loyalty that is n't mine."

Two wills leapt to battle in the dusk beneath the cross-lights overhead. It was the woman who spoke first: —

"If 't were Paradise within your arms, I would n't come."

"'T is all that, dear love; I know how to love, and you can learn."

"Stop!" she cried imperatively. "Enough of you and me. I want to have your help. We all need your help so badly."

"And I want you so badly."

"Hush! You know what I mean, — how things are all going wrong with Nix and Rosemary."

"Do you ask me to interfere between husband and wife? Believe me, though I may have had vast experience, that 's impossible. School the nagging tongue of your little cousin, that 's all."

"God knows I do my best, but will you not help me?"

"How?" he asked, with a contemptuous shrug of his

shoulders. The subject had little interest for him in the turmoil of his own mind; he even wondered whether the anxiety of Silphine were only a pose.

"Keep him with you in the evenings," said Silphine. "You are strong; be strong for him. You know 't is for a time, I believe, only. Rosemary worries him, and then, though he loves her, he wants to forget that she is sad and angry and evil to him."

"And so he comes home as he did last night?" said Repath, with a half-laugh.

"As he did last night. It would kill Rosemary if she knew why he is so strange in the evening."

"I don't care a dash for your cousin. It 's you I 'm thinking of."

"I suppose you 're all brutes at bottom."

"Perhaps. Anyway, it 's no matter. Has he often come home so?"

"Three times now, and I dread his father knowing it. He 's only weak."

"And that 's the worst thing you can say of any man."

"Will you help me? Use the power over him that you have."

There was a silence. Repath was laughing to himself at a woman's view of the situation. His mind was running on a certain "daughter of Jezebel," and his thoughts were busy with the maidens who "tired themselves" for the destruction of men. He distinctly classed Rosemary with that noble company.

"Will you do what I ask?" repeated Silphine.

"What will you give me to become this young cub's nurse? Come, tell me that."

They were standing now in the doorway of the granary, just within the shadow of the wheel; the splashing of the water made a low monotone of accompaniment to their voices.

"Just this." She suddenly stooped, and he felt a burning touch on his hand. The next moment the stepping-stones he had laid for her slipped deeper into the ooze as a footstep fled across them.

Chapter XIII

A Butterfly's Wing

OLD SIR WALTER'S room lay in deep shadow, the window-spaces were plates of blue steel with star-points on them, for the blinds were up and the shutters open, and the galaxy of star clusters seemed to come close up to the house. A flickering flame darted up now and again from the dying fire and caught the malevolent griffin face on an old blue tile. There was the sense of a human presence in the room, though only the dim outline of the furniture was to be seen. The rustle of a woman's skirts was heard in the passage, then there was a silence as the wearer listened in the stillness; it was Silphine, whose ruddy hair caught for a moment the ray of the dimly burning lamp in the passage behind her. Suddenly the eight-day clock gave a loud warning, and then with a sigh struck — one, two; two o'clock in the night; again there was a silence, save for the slight, involuntary movement made by Silphine after the breathing pause she had made in listening for the strike. At last the silence was too painful to be borne.

"Rosemary," she cried sharply, "are you there? Why have you got the hall light burning? What are you doing?"

There was only an impatient movement from the room, but that was enough. It was a relief to Silphine, while at the same time it confirmed the suspicion with which she had started up a few minutes earlier from her first sleep.

In a moment she had crossed the room, found a paper spill on the mantel-piece and laid it to the flame, and the candle she held burnt up. A crouching figure in the big chair by the fire showed by the tossed and tumbled masses of hair and by the trailing red gown who it was. Silphine saw a convulsive sob shake the form painfully, and terror laid hold of her, but she kept it back: this was probably only a fit of hysteria such as had occurred several times lately.

"Where is Nix, and why are you here?" she asked as quietly as she could.

"He's not come home, and I'm waiting for him."

The voice was so thin and shrill that Silphine suddenly bent over her. Rosemary turned her face up to her cousin, and the blue veins of her forehead stood out painfully from the pinched face.

"Little one," said Silphine, with a great rush of pity, "you must n't wait here. He may not come for hours, and you will be so cold."

"No, I'm not cold." A hot flush seized Silphine as she glanced at the wine-bottle by her cousin's side.

"Come," she said firmly; "come with me."

"No, I won't. He does n't care for me any more. I 've waited hour after hour, and he 's never come. I 've listened for his footsteps, and I seem to have heard so many coming, but they were never his."

"But you will make yourself ill if you go on like this," said Silphine, kneeling down by the child's side and taking her shivering figure in her arms, "and you must n't be ill now."

"I don't care. I never wanted it, and Nix does n't care now. He saw how ugly I was to-day. I hated myself then."

"It is n't true, Rosemary."

"It is. He goes out of the house to keep away from me; I know it."

"No, no; it is that you anger him sometimes."

"Yes, I know that too. He does n't know how lonely I am. Nobody comes to see me, and nobody knows me — or wants to. I shall come one day to say, as I heard a woman do once, 'Ah, he never lifted his hand against me, never once, for all he was a drinking man.' She called that having a good husband."

"Rosemary, you must be more reasonable. It 's wicked to go on like this, and you 'll only make him more angry if he finds you waiting up for him."

"Hush!" said Rosemary, suddenly, sitting up and lifting a forefinger, "that 's Clover's step; I should know it anywhere."

Silphine could feel the child's heart give a leap, and its

tumultuous beating sent a flush of red into the little face: was it come to this, that she was afraid of the husband she had once ordered about so gaily? It seemed so, for Silphine could see that her lips were shaking as she said, pushing her towards the door, —

"Go, go; he must not see you here."

Silphine fled up the stairs towards her room; her heart sank as she heard the noise made by Nix in fastening the great bar across the front door. She stood in the shadow of her doorway and watched Rosemary walk heavily up the six steps leading to the level of the hall floor, saw her stand with the candle held near burning cheeks as she leant against the rail which now stretched out on either side from the wall towards the opening where in olden days a gate had been fixed to keep the hall dogs from going into the front of the house.

The dying lamp gave a sudden flicker and went out, so that the only light in the place was supplied by the flame of Rosemary's candle, which swayed to and fro in the draughty old place, almost touching her waves of hair. Nix stood for a moment in the entrance, his eyes dazzled, then he made a step forward. At first Silphine thought he would pass Rosemary without noticing her. But, coming up until he stood side by side with his wife, he looked straight at her.

"What the devil," he said in savage tones, "do you mean by waiting here for me? Am I to be dogged night and day by you?"

Rosemary made no answer, though her lips moved,

and Silphine perceived that terror held her spell-bound. Irritated by her silence, Nix placed a hand on his wife's shoulder and pushed her in front of him. The touch was firm and heavy, her shaking limbs were awkward in the long, swathing gown that hung about the feet, and Rosemary was habitually clumsy in movement; Silphine saw a sudden stumble, heard a little cry, and the last flicker of the candle revealed a huddled figure at the foot of the low stairs.

"My God! I have killed her," she heard Nix say in suddenly sobered tones. It was the work of an instant for her to dart down the stairway to the helpless form.

Nix relit the candle, and they both bent over Rosemary. The deathly whiteness of Nix's face brought Silphine to a consciousness of his need. "It was a faint," she said, with her hand on Rosemary's pulse, "as much as your touch."

"Don't speak to me," he said, "for the love of God!" lifting his wife in his arms with an agony in his face that made Rosemary look calm in comparison. They brought her back to consciousness in a few minutes, but the sick dread in her face whenever Nix leant over her made Silphine, in mercy to him, send him away on any pretext.

"The doctor says, Nix," said Silphine, standing by him in the sitting-room, in the sickly dawn-light, "that she has twisted an ankle, but he cannot tell more at present. He wants to disturb her as little as possible."

"She is conscious?"

"Half delirious. You must n't go near her till she is herself again."

"She fears me?"

"She hears footsteps constantly. Hark! you can hear her now if you come into the passage."

"One, two, three," sounded the voice from overhead again and again.

"Is she suffering?" asked Nix, in a low tone.

"Not much, I think; and of course she 's having sleeping draughts. Nix," said Silphine, moved by the stark misery of his face, "you know it was n't your push, but her own weakness, that led to this accident. I saw it all, and I know."

"I broke her heart first, you mean, that 's all."

The bitterness of that moment Nix never forgot, but it was not all as bitter as it might have been, for Rosemary recovered partially from the illness into which she had been thrown, and crept about the house once more. What kind of reconciliation was that of Rosemary and Nix no one knew, but Silphine saw that she need have no more recourse to Repath's aid in guarding Nix from his own weakness. The shock of this accident had sobered him completely; furthermore, it was clear that fear of Nix would never more be among the terrors of his little wife. Nix's agony of repentance had been great enough to show her that he would never treat her with deliberate cruelty again. The tenderest care, the greatest solicitude, the most unwearying patience, were always ready for Rosemary's most trying days, for wherever Nix

went he carried with him the vision of a white face unconsciously upturned to him; "my work," thought Nix. Silphine inwardly marvelled at his gentleness, especially when the yellow demon of jealousy began to spoil the relationship between herself and Rosemary.

It so chanced that Silphine had got into the habit, during Rosemary's illness, of going in to help her during the process of dressing; and this habit, which was no trouble to the brisk energy of Silphine, was continued for months after the original accident. One morning the two were together thus, in the light of midday, which flooded the room with that clear, passionless light that seems so cruel to the tired. Suddenly Rosemary caught the reflection of the two faces in the mirror, before which she sat while Silphine brushed her hair.

"Look," she said, longing to heighten her own annoyance, as one sometimes presses hard on a wound to anger it the more, "look at the difference between us."

She caught the hand that held the brush, and Silphine, too, gazed into the mirror. The active life she lived, the morning air she daily breathed, the wholesome food, the long quiet nights that can be broken by no jarring, racking sound,—all these had written their signs on Silphine's body. But radiant skin and hair, bright eyes, mobile lips, had received their last finishing touch from passion's hand. There was life's red meaning in every flash of eye, every turn of the regally carried head on the white column, that she never hid away from the light; there was the joy of passion's life in the air round

her, the tenderness of passion's surrender in the long eyelashes.

The blue veins of Rosemary's face, the white morbid colouring of the skin, that in health formed her chief beauty, showed weakness, weariness, in every line. Although the face was shrunken, the skin seemed strained over the tiny face. The sight of both, side by side in the mirror, concentrated in a moment's flash the pent-up emotions of many months, and Rosemary first knew clearly the hate that had been growing up within her towards her cousin. Her breath rose and fell in gasps, as she watched Silphine put down the brush and begin to coil up the hair.

"Rosemary," said Silphine, raising her eyes for a second from her task, to glance again in the mirror; the sight was to her confessedly a pleasant one, "why are you so miserable? Let us talk it over rationally. We can all see that you almost hate your life. Perhaps if you were to put it into words, you would see that you were but fighting with shadows."

"How dare you ask me in that cool way, when you have all that could possibly make anyone happy, and I have nothing?"

"Of course," said Silphine, argumentatively, "you are not strong, but you will not be ill for ever, and then you will have a great joy. Nix loves you, and you have what thousands of women would give anything to get. Why should you be so unhappy? You make yourself ill, and everyone about you most miserable sometimes."

table; everyone at 'Light and Come In had learnt by this time to meet Rosemary's attacks with silence, perhaps that was why she was so often irritated.

The two faces again gleamed in the mirror; and Silphine's face was once more close to Rosemary's, upon whom a sudden impulse fell.

"Go away, or I shall strike you," she hissed in sudden fury, as she pictured to herself how the firm white flesh would feel under her hand, how satisfying to the soul.

Silphine stood gazing at the furious little face that seemed suddenly transformed as though a malevolent fury had seized upon the dwelling-place of Rosemary's body. She fled from the room with a shamefaced sense of having looked into some dark, unholy, forbidden place; in a sudden flash of insight she saw how Rosemary looked at her, as the incarnation of the joy of life, of all that she herself was losing; namely, strength, power, charm. And of what use would life be without these to such a self-centred woman?

Chapter XIV

Venus Victrix

MR. CALMADY'S admiration for Silphine had taken practical shape in the loan of a good riding horse, which he had offered her after hearing from Nix of her struggles to think she enjoyed riding on the old cob Clover, on whom Nix made his rounds. It was understood that Silphine was only a visitor for a few months at the farm, and that the mare sent over by Mr. Calmady was to be considered as existing for her use during that period. On the arrival of the new mount at 'Light and Come In, Repath had insisted on making a preliminary trial of her temper to see if she were quiet enough for a lady's use; this care on his part Rosemary chose to take as a personal affront to herself.

The horse, a fine bay, was waiting in the yard one bright winter day for Silphine to mount, and Repath himself was to be her companion, as the ride was partly a business errand to a distant moorland farm. It was the first time that the two had ridden any considerable distance together, and Repath, as he stood with the bridles of the nosing horses under his arm, was

inwardly praying the time-god for an indefinite lengthening of the golden hours that stretched before his view.

Nix and Rosemary were standing inside the window of the hall watching for Silphine, and as they stood thus the little wife was in an unwontedly affectionate mood, for she was meditatively rubbing her cheek up and down Nix's rough coat-sleeve, while Sally's grinning face watched the two from the doorway into the back kitchen; she considered that Rosemary's was a very effective demonstration, and resolved to try it on a rustic adorer's susceptibilities before she was much older. There was, indeed, a wistfulness about Rosemary that made Nix say,—

"You shall go riding some day, dearest; Silphine sha'n't have it all her own way."

"Oh, nobody will worry about providing me with horses, Nix," pouted she.

"I shall," said he, putting an arm round her; "there is n't anything I would n't get for you, if I could afford it."

"Oh, yes, you, of course."

"And I'm only Nix," said he, with the proper amount of regret; "but you 'll learn to put up with me at last."

"UMM, suppose so," said Rosemary; "but," as Silphine appeared by the horses, "you ought not to let those two ride about together."

"Since when did this thing," said Nix, touching his

chest, "set up to be a grandmother? You women do like to fuss over things."

"Sometimes they like to see things coming, that's all," said Rosemary, with a sudden flush that pulsed up like a wave into a land-locked pond.

Fortunately for Nix at the moment the significance of her remark was quite lost on him. In truth, it was Rosemary herself who had smoothed away all obstacles to this ride to-day; they should, at least, do their love-making away from her sight, she told herself, — more especially as the doing of it might make it unpleasant for Silphine to stay much longer at the farm. More definitely than this she dared not speak, even to herself.

In the meanwhile the forward heave of the muscles of their horses, the keen rush of the air, the sense of nearness, was enough for the riders. The joy of rapid motion that sent the blood flowing from heart to finger-tips, the long shadows that waved in swathes of swift-changing colour over the sunlit moorland, where the tors lie out to the open heavens, — all these formed a clearly felt share in the intoxication of a bodily vigour that makes the joy of the panther's rush, of the swift wings' flight through the sunlit heaven.

Presently the sense of mere nearness conquered all else; they were riding close beside each other through narrow lanes where the sandy soil crumbled away in the hedge wherever the clasping heather roots had no hold.

"Dearest," he said, leaning from his horse to seize

her bridle; the two horses were friends, too, and laid their heads close together for an instant.

"No, no," said Silphine; "let us go on."

She dreaded anything that could break in upon that divine aloofness from thought and struggle,— an aloofness born of rapid circulation in this ride to the world's end.

On they rode till the cultivated land was only visible in the painfully worked patches regained from the grasp of Nature by strong human effort. They rested the horses at the farm where Repath's errand lay; they ate and drank, though still the sense of being together was all that reached clear consciousness. Years afterwards, with a sudden darting into life of the sub-conscious self, Repath saw again the hurried meal in the granite homestead and smelt the food once more, though the hour after he had eaten he could not have told what lay on the table.

At last the horses were brought out, and again they mounted.

"Are you for more, or must we go back?" said Repath, with only a partial comprehension of what his question meant. Certainly Silphine had no feeling of anything but that she wanted no going back to the old paths where the smug every-day world awaited her.

At last they reached a lonely village where the blackened, tar-roofed houses formed great squares of grimness in the grey night shadows which mingled with the western light. The tired horses halted before the one inn of the place, and Repath dismounted. For a

moment he held her close, but still her consciousness lay dormant, as he knew from the quiet with which she suffered him to lift her in dismounting.

After some time spent in seeing to the comfort of their tired beasts, he found her standing by the corner-fireplace of the inn parlour looking down on the glow that lit up the stuffed foxes and the hunting pictures. The print of Tom Cannon and the picture which usually accompanies it, Little Red Riding Hood, flickered in the dancing light. Behind him came the landlady, who bore a flaming paraffin lamp and was loud in expressions of pity for "his lady," who seemed to have ridden such a long way. There was a glance of comprehension at last from Silphine, as she looked at the splashes on her habit and caught for an instant the gleam from her companion's eyes. The hand shook that poured out their tea, and she could scarcely conceal the trembling that caught her every now and then during their meal. At last it was over, and the two were alone and without fear of interruptions.

"When do we start again for home?" said Silphine. Her heart-beats filled her ears and seemed to herself to fill the room.

"We can't start at all to-night. My mare is gone dead lame," he said quietly, putting his boot on a glowing ember that had fallen from the burning pile, to press the fire out. He was in deadly earnest in getting this task done.

"And you knew it before?" she said, rising as she spoke.

"For some time I have known," he said, also rising quickly.

She was silent till he looked at her with a quiet glance that was almost one of triumph: capture may be satisfactory to the savage woman, but Eve has learnt to love better another sort of mastery than that. Silphine felt wildly angry and was glad of it; it kept out all possibility of other feelings.

"Faugh," she said, "what a fool I am! We can get another mount for you."

"We cannot — in this out-of-the world place."

"Then I will ride back alone."

"It will take till to-morrow with your ignorance of the road and your worn-out horse, even if I would let you do it."

"Let me?" she panted.

"Yes, let you," he spoke, looking her straight in the face, but mercifully for himself, perhaps, with no shadow of a smile. "Don't you think this has gone on long enough? You know what you are to me, you evade me, you play with me, and you are — here with me."

"I never cared or thought what we were doing till now."

"No, because you would ride to the world's end with me, because I have more power over you with my one hand than that lover of yours with all his strength. Put that all away; it is behind you now. The dance of the hours has brought us here together, — that 's enough for you and me."

He caught her hands in his to draw her nearer, but the force of resistance within her was growing to a wild height of prayer.

"Listen," she said, speaking calmly as his voice rose in hoarse strength; "I confess it all. You have the power you say, — it would be useless to deny it, — but John has still a hold on me; ay, and I think a deeper hold — or a truer, I don't know which."

"It's a sort of hold that works rather intermittently, at any rate, and it appears to leave you to the will of any chance comer."

"Not at all. I am not a chance flower to be picked by any passer-by. You have misunderstood me altogether. Let me tell you plainly how it seems to me. You know how it is with one when the laughter and dancing, the hot excitement of the night, is over. Then there comes a cold wind with the morning, and the freshness of it makes you wonder at and shrink from yourself of the night before. He seems to come to me with the daylight — "

"And I am for the night. That, dear one, is because you knew him in your dream time, when you were a child. You put him into the background of the fields, and we stand in the light of a lamp that — smells vilely. 'T is the surroundings that you confuse with the facts."

"Oh, it's more than that; I 'm sure it is."

"Then why are you here with me now? And even if it is, the laughter and the dancing have their day; the

dance of the hours brings that too in turn, as you would say."

Gradually her will was failing, her head was very near the abandonment of surrender, but his last words brought a picture of a twilight field bathed in the May light; it was the twilight of the gods, as John Saxon had taught her to call it.

"I cannot; I will not." His lips were almost close enough to stop the words as they rose, but she still kept him back.

"Let us rob," she said, "if you will, not steal. I cannot, cannot play a traitor's part to him. I cannot, whatever I may do when he knows what I 'm doing."

This was the only way in which John's claim now presented itself to her; the real doubt at the back of her mind was, after all, her own rights.

"Will you tell him, then? Will you give him up for me?"

"If you will let me go now. Ah, do not misuse your own power."

"'T is I who must cry for mercy, but I will not take what you will not give. Silphine, is my love nothing to you? Surely we have kissed often enough in fancy."

Suddenly Genefer's words "'T is acts, not thoughts, that count in the big books up above," came back. She felt saved, but her trembling knees refused to hold her up any longer, and for a second or two the room swam round her; when she came to herself, she was alone.

"I have found a screw that will carry me," he said quietly, opening the door some time after; "you must ride very slowly. She 'll manage with your light weight, and we must crawl."

"You forgive me," she said, touching his sleeve gently as she passed to the door; woman's waywardness whimpered in her, had he only known.

"You have promised, you know," he said in a whisper, holding her back from the door.

"Yes," she said gently. Every woman's nature becomes a mystery to a man at some point; Repath's evidently failed at the point where a woman gets her own way and wishes she had not.

They rode on through the night, only pausing to knock up a sleepy cottager once or twice to inquire the way. The tired horses stumbled on, and twice Repath heard a long shivering sob from his companion. His lips lost their look of being cut in high relief, as the muscles round them tightened at the sound; but he made no sign, save to ask now and then if she could still go on. A vengeful fire burnt within him, and no suffering of hers could bring anything but satisfaction to him at that moment. At last they reached the farm, and found, as Silphine had feared, that all the entrances were barred for the night. The faintest tinge of eastern light clung to the back of the house, but the front lay still in the night shadows. At last the sand Repath flung up roused Nix, and with great amazement he opened the barred door.

"We've been out half the night," he said, "looking for you. We thought you'd got bogged."

"We went too far and lost our way," said Repath; "explanations in the morning. We're all dead beat now. I'll put the horses up; you go in and see to Miss Rosdew."

Nix found Silphine leaning, half numb with weariness, over the end of the settle.

"What, in Heaven's name, have you been doing, Silphine?"

There was no answer.

"How can you play with your good name in this way? Repath ought to be horsewhipped. I wish neither he nor you had seen this place."

"Oh, Nix, Nix, don't be angry! I'm so tired and sorry." She was sobbing like a child, but Nix was too kindly for long upbraiding of any sinner that ever crawled this earth.

"Here, drink this," he said, after a short excursion out of the dim-lit room, where a melancholy horn lantern was the only illuminant.

"Poor old girl!" he said, patting her in brotherly fashion, as, like a naughty, worn-out child, she gulped down the contents of the glass. "I sha'n't believe any harm of you," he added; "you're too good a sort for that. It's the rascally women and their tongues that I'm thinking about."

"Oh, I don't care," wailed Silphine; "I'm too wretched to care for any of that."

"That's a mortal bad sign," said Nix to himself, as he meditatively blinked at the candle he was holding out to Silphine when they stood on the landing which divided the two halves of the house. It was a dreadful problem, and Nix withdrew to consider it, leaving Silphine to sob out some hours of the morning, till fatigue weighed down her aching eyelids.

Chapter XV

The Falling Star

NOTHING creates so rapidly a sense of isolation from one's fellows as self-consciousness in all its forms, from the self-absorption of the radiantly happy to the shivering sense of unlikeness felt by those who bear the burden of physical or moral deformity. Such consciousness closed about Silphine as an atmosphere of suspicion which she felt wherever she went, or whatever glance fell upon her. A grin from Sally, whose red face was usually clothed in grins, a chuckle from the work-folk, the half-heard, wholly misunderstood, sentence of a chance stranger,—these were to her shrinking sensitiveness fresh stings that brought a tingling quiver of pain to her.

Nor were these feelings unmarked by those around her. Each shiver of self-consciousness on her part was taken as a mark of guilt by most, was seen with deep sorrow by Nix, with a shuddering pleasure by Rosemary.

To Silphine the pain she endured was a goad that drove her, not nearer, but farther away from the cause of her humiliation. She felt that her promise of openly breaking with John Saxon had been wrung from her, and

that she was in no sense bound by it, though by carrying it out she would save herself from some of the gossip she now endured. Only once did Repath himself refer to the promise, as of an act which he only vaguely expected from her; but the shamefaced, hesitating way in which he recalled it to her made her wonder if he had all along merely meant her to be humiliated.

Scandal and gossip, then, seemed to be bringing the two no nearer towards any recognised position. This was, of course, no surprise to the gossips, but it was to Rosemary, who understood the affair far better than Nix, though she could not understand the still-pervading influence of John Saxon.

"Surely," said Rosemary to herself, "Silphine must go, either with Repath or without. She cannot bear to stay in a place where they talk so much about her."

But when Silphine showed no signs of yielding to the storm she had raised about her ears, Rosemary sought about for a means of getting rid of the girl, who appeared to think that she alone, out of all the women who had been gossiped about, could defy the tongue of slander.

First, she tried Nix.

"How can you stand by and not interfere?" she asked him indignantly. "Let them get married and go. Why do you let them both stay here to bring all sorts of rumours about? 'T is talked about in every cottage, I am certain; and it 's all your fault for making such a fuss in looking for them that night. I told you

it was n't the moors but their own wickedness that kept them away. Now you must put your foot down."

"I 'm not going to burn my fingers in such a ticklish job. Leave well alone, that 's my motto. Besides, he does n't seem to want anything now but to cry off. I would n't have believed it of the fellow. No, leave well alone, that 's my ticket."

"And don't leave ill alone," said Rosemary to herself, "that 's mine."

She had a sudden inspiration that sent the blood careering to her finger-tips.

"Oh, oh, oh," she said, in the privacy of her room, "it 's a way to make her lose one lover — or both. But it 's like a servant-maid to do it. Shall I? Shall I? How wicked Nix would think it, but he should have listened to me. Nobody ever thinks I know anything. I shall have to use cunning; and, after all, it 's doing her, the cat, a good turn in the long run. Oh, oh, oh, let 's see how it looks. But I must be careful to tear up the rough copies. How shall I do it? Sign my own name? No, then everybody would know, for he would come fussing here. Let 's see. Oh, it 's like a servant girl. Never mind; I don't care. She sha'n't play fast and loose, and make every one look down on us more than they did before."

Here she scribbled on half a sheet of note-paper, —

"You will find yourself tricked by the bird you have left at 'Light and Come In. You are being fooled, for there is a

cuckoo in the nest. If you are a man and care at all, you ought to be warned of this. A friend writes this."

Making a hasty copy in rough, blurred writing, Rosemary hurriedly pushed it into an envelope and addressed it to John Saxon with the address which she had learnt one day from Silphine. Her heart was beating most unpleasantly, but she nevertheless saw clearly how she could get it posted. It should be taken into Plymouth and despatched there by the old woman who took the dairy produce of the farm to market.

This was done by the evening, and Rosemary's excited face and hurried manner were ascribed to her excitement at hearing that the fox had been at work among the hens; everyone else was excited about this catastrophe, and why not Rosemary?

It was the season of the year when, as the February days grow longer, men begin to look for spring, though long snowy days have yet to be endured. The wintry hours passed in the midst of a sunless cold that would not suffer the tree-buds to show even in sheltered corners. Day after day the cloud shield covered the sky and seemed to wrap away the coming spring and the fresh winds, as if winter refused to relax his mailed grasp. Only the lilt of the birds and the piercing, protesting cry of the lambs told of the fair time ahead. There was a sense of longing expectation over the earth for a time when the greyness should go.

On a day in this waiting time the life-and-death an-

gel hovered over 'Light and Come In, but he brought into the house, where tradition said that no child had been born for a hundred years, more death than life; the new life flickered out in the first hour of its separate existence, born prematurely, and it seemed very probable that the older life would follow it.

Rosemary was conscious when they brought Nix into the room where she lay, with one dread time behind her, and another, as they thought, still to come. The white clothes in which she lay looked blue-white under the shaded lamp by side of the ivory tint of her face with the dark shadows on it that no ivory ever has. The toneless whisper from her lips seemed to fill the room.

"Stay by me," she said, as he lifted her neck on to his arm. "I 'm so afraid; the room is full of shadows." Great drops of weakness and fear stood on her forehead.

"Dear heart, of what are you afraid?" he said, speaking in as low a tone as possible, because his strong voice sounded cruel. She did not answer; she scarcely knew what he asked, for only human nearness, not human thought, could comfort her.

"I 've always been afraid," she said, after a long silence, "of everything. So often I 've felt sick with fear of people. You never knew. Only I 'm not afraid of you. I was sometimes most afraid when I spoke most sharply. And now it 's coming, death is, and I 'm afraid of it."

She spoke as one speaks of a secret. The shadows

of the room seemed filled with a dreadful presence, and though nothing but the bright, dark eyes had power to move, they saw all the blackness outside the lamplit circle.

"Dearest," said Nix, as if the words were choking him, "perhaps it is n't death at all; and it can't be so very hard, for people have died so often."

"Old people don't mind, perhaps, they sleep; but it 's cold, and I love to be warm. Oh, if you could go with me!"

The sudden sleep of exhaustion fell on her for a few minutes; then she roused herself as if she had been reminded of something in sleep.

"I 've been wicked, too. I wrote to Silphine's lover —that she might lose him. I suppose that 's wicked, for I hated her."

"Would you be more at ease if you told her now?"

"I cannot." The eyes were wide with fear again. "I 've told you; surely that 's enough."

"Yes, yes; try to sleep."

"I 'm glad it 's dead," she said after a long silence during which he thought she had been asleep; "it might have been weak like me."

She slept again soundly for many hours in a room in which was kept the silence of the grave she so dreaded, and the death angel raised his wings in flight once more from 'Light and Come In.

Her recovery was slow and unsatisfactory, and Nix often thought of the forty years hence to which he had

banished pain and suffering on their first evening at the farm. The doctor feared that the sofa to which she was carried every day might be but a prison to her for years. Still the sunshine fell on the daffodils, and Rosemary was among the things of life once more; for herself, she had no fear of the weariness of an invalid's life, in the joy of being spared to live at any price and to cherish that soft white body of hers to which she had always been so deeply attached. Nix could not discover whether the confession she had made to him was inspired by the delirium of the moment or by fear of what she had actually done. In any case no action could be taken in respect to it till Rosemary had taken many more steps towards health. In the meanwhile it dwelt far back in the recesses of Nix's mind as a shadowy fear, which every hour that passed served to throw farther into the background of his thoughts.

Chapter XVI

Malesuada Fama

THE Stag Hotel, that is, house licensed to sell beer, tobacco, and snuff to be consumed on the premises, — a mile away from 'Light and Come In, — was kept by a lone widow. Houses of this type always are; at the same time there always is in such places a startling scarcity of provisions. Eggs in the spring had never been so scarce, even in blackberry time; mutton or beef was not to be obtained. Rusty bacon there was and "hard" cider, but little besides.

On this fare John Saxon had supped and dined and expected to breakfast next morning, for he meant to stay here until fortune should grant him an explanation of the mysterious letter he had received from Rosemary. He now sat by the bar fire, ostensibly warming himself by the log blaze which flickered over the blackened settles and on the sides of bacon hanging from the beams of the ceiling; in reality he was listening hungrily to every word that was said by chance comers. There was an air of neglect about his person, an air even of lost self-respect, due, one would have said, to some penetrating, sordid cause. His frayed linen collars and cuffs matched the badly razored face; indeed, latterly he had

joined the noble army of fidgety men who cannot shave themselves, — subtle sign of demoralisation, it seemed to himself, who had always prided himself on a steady hand and mind.

From the settle where he sat he could dimly see the forms of two men, one tall, broad-shouldered, and powerful-looking, the other bowed and old, standing in conversation just outside the window. Presently the old man entered, calling for a glass of "zider," and sat down on the settle near the door. It was, unknown to him, the god from the machine for whom he had been waiting all day, for Zeb of 'Light and Come In took a great interest in his neighbour's affairs, and this was he.

"Well, Mr. Zebedee," said the landlady, bustling in with the cider herself and smoothing her apron in an alluring manner; Mr. Zebedee was thought to have saved a tidy sum, and was likewise a "widow-man."

Unfortunately mine hostess had only one eye, but the defect was partially concealed by the black bandeau of hair which was always carefully drawn down over the eye-socket. For the rest, the remaining eye had a hungry expression, as it well might have, living in a house where rusty bacon formed the staple food.

"Well, Mr. Zeb, you 'm quite a stranger. Have n't set eyes on 'ee for a fairish time back along, but, there, a body might be dead and buried afore you 'd step in friendly-like to pass the time of day."

"Iss; I 'm not much of a company man," said Zeb, modestly.

"And," said she, with a gap-toothed eagerness that showed she felt herself on the verge of a daringly delightful topic, "you 've had a tidy lot of goings on up to 'Light and Come In by what I hear. Kept 'ee pretty busy, I 'll warn."

The hand that held John's pipe shook, but he went on filling it in leisurely fashion, looking at the fire the while in a seemingly preoccupied fashion. Zeb made no reply beyond a series of grunts, which, judging from her grins, the lady found full of information.

"And that 's him you was colloguing with afore you stepped in?"

"Iss, thiccy was him," said Zeb, in a cautious undertone; "thiccy was the bird. That 's Repath, right enough."

"Comes from up the country, by what they tells me," said the landlady, in the genteel tone of one seeking useful geographical information.

"Maybe, maybe," said Zeb, between the puffs at his pipe, which he had by this time produced. He really "knew no more than the dead," but a man's ignorance should never be exposed to a woman. It sets the woman up too much, especially if she should happen to have superior sources of information. Zeb had acquired all this wisdom during the lifetime of his deceased helpmate.

"But there," said the landlady, not to be baffled, "up the country or down, he must be a bad lot; and as to her, — the baggage, — with her fine name and the tossy ways of her, I 'd whip her till the blood ran."

John Saxon felt a sudden sense of relief; it could not possibly be Silphine of whom they spoke, and yet the reference to a fine name was ominous.

"Oh, I don't know, her 's a fine enough filly. I like 'em neater in shape; but there, us can't all think alike," said Zeb, with a tolerant endurance of other men's follies.

"Out together, they tell me, all the blessed night, and riding home together as easy as you please, and then going about with a face as mum as if butter would not melt in her mouth. Sally up at the house heard every word maister said to her, and 't was all over village in a whip and turn."

"Darn the women and their tongues! A bit o' merry-making won't mend 'ee or end 'ee," said Zeb, taking a broad-minded view.

"Tcha, tcha, tcha!" said the lady, in shocked tones of horror; "you 're an old rip, I 'm very much afeared."

Zeb cocked his head at a rakish angle, and tried to live up to his reputation. "Hee, hee, hee!" laughed his toothless jaws; "what do the chillern say? —

'One, two, three,
There came a maid with me.'

'T was only a bit of fun, if you old dummuns did n't take it up and twist it like a blindworm turns his old tail. I commend 'em for showing a bit o' sperrit. There 's them as have got the sperrit and have n't got the chance to show it."

"Get out, do," said the lady, highly delighted; "you 'll come to a bad end, and so will that Silphine of yours, a-making herself a by-word and coming into a quiet parish where there 's been no such shandy-dans —"

"Since the days of Adam," put in Zeb, with a sigh; "'t is most mortal dull, too, with never a bit o' looseness to stir 'ee up. I can mind the first of 'em that I walked with —"

Zeb's reminiscences were cut short by the silent stranger, who got up suddenly and walked out of the room. The air of the place stifled him, and he heard Zeb say, as he went out, —

"Lordy, Lordy, I clean forgot there was a soul 'pon settle till a went out like a tail-piped dog."

John Saxon walked in the direction in which he had been told the farm lay. The tender twilight, the lilting birds around him, seemed dreamlike as he looked at the hell of passions within him.

"Which of us has done this thing?" he asked himself, leaning over a gate with a physical sensation that made him want to hold on to something firm, —"I, who left her to herself and her own nature, or he?" Her "I want you" struck him for the first time with its real significance. For one mad moment he felt his strength used in battering the life out of the man who had ruined the temple for him. The fit passed, and he saw how such an act could but complete the ruin wrought by his own neglect, his own coldness, — a coldness, a priggishness, which had merely taken the woman waiting somewhere for him

as a thing as certain and inevitable as the coming of the sunshine. He must go out of her life as noiselessly as possible.

A letter came to Silphine two days after with a few words of good-bye,—a letter which she burnt instantly in the flame of a candle, as if she could not wait to get to the fire to dispose of it. The real sting was his instant assumption of her guilt; evidently he could not see in her anything but the Delilah whom he hated so.

This sting drove her nearer to Repath; but she made no sign save by a quietness that he could not understand and that made Rosemary fear her plan had worked out contrary to her hopes. But a sudden fit of irritation at the apparent failure of her plans, a sudden burst of jealousy, conquered Rosemary's fears of Silphine's rage, and she told what she had done before her illness.

"And," said Silphine, drawing herself up to her full height and looking down on Rosemary, who was on her sofa as usual, "you knew all along that I had done no wrong, and you wrote to John Saxon? You did that, knowing all you did?"

"How was I to know better than other people?" said Rosemary deprecatingly; her irritation was dead, her fears alive.

"But you did know; you always have. Do you think I have n't seen that all through? You wanted me to be guilty, but you knew all the time that I was n't."

"Well, you made yourself cheap enough. I think you are one of the most wicked women I have ever

known," said Rosemary, with a calmness that her shaking lips belied; "you never seem to know your own mind as a decent woman should."

"You knew your own mind, at any rate," retorted Silphine, feeling rather like an angry fishwife.

"You're very cruel," sobbed Rosemary; "I wish you would go away. You don't care for John Saxon, and it's a shame for him to be cheated. I don't care what you say. I'm sure I did right; I always do."

She was beginning to show alarming signs of a tendency to knock her heels spasmodically on the sofa, but Silphine paid no heed.

"I believe," she said, "that I loved him better when he sent that cruel letter than I have ever done before. He treats me as if he had at least always expected good actions from me."

"And yet you shake when the other one comes into the room suddenly."

Rosemary was quiet again now; the sinfulness of Silphine was sometimes as good as a play to her.

"Oh, yes," said Silphine, carelessly, "I suppose I shall marry him now, sometime."

"If he asks you."

Yes, it had come to that now; but Silphine had no real fears of the issue beside that one of her own lowered standard, which she told herself was half the fancy for forbidden fruit.

Chapter XVII

The Dead Past

IN the dark passage of the cottage where Repath lodged there was too little light when the front door was shut for the expression on anyone's face to be clearly seen.

There was only a moment's dead silence in the cold, stone-floored place when the woman of the house told him, with a gulp of stolid excitement, that a person and a child were waiting for him and eating bread and butter as "cool as you please" in the front parlour. There was no look of anger on his face, still less of surprise, as he stepped into the small ugly room which the snow-light flooded in streams of white garishness that lit up with terrible clearness the scene before him. He seemed to have been waiting for this all along, and now it had come; that was all.

There was a whole world of explanation in the hurried, furtive manner in which his visitor rose from the table where she had been feeding the curly-haired three-year-old boy who stood by her side. The desperation of weakness had brought her here; Repath knew this at once, but the knowledge made him no gentler.

He eyed in silence the soft, overflowing amplitude of her figure, the fluffy hair, the cheeks where the pinkness had run into streaks of colour, as if visible hands of terror had laid white marks on them, the town finery, all unfit for the snowy lanes and cold winds. Nothing escaped him, not the downward droop of discontent taken by the full lips or the sodden, grey-looking boots from which the snow had melted. The child's shoes were spotless; he was heavy, but she must have carried him from the station, for it was evident that the shoes he wore had touched nothing damp.

The two stood watching each other while the sleepy little one eyed them. This was daddy, he knew quite well; but he was afraid and shrank nearer his mother, who twisted her fingers restlessly in his ruddy hair. William Repath made no sign as if he would sit down, and the woman seemed afraid to do so for the moment, though the thunder of nervousness beat in her ears and she could scarcely stand.

"Why have you dared to come here in this way, and why did you leave where I put you? When you have answered those questions, you can go," he said at last, trying to beat down his rage.

"I will not go," she answered. The sound of her own voice frightened her, but with the relief of speech courage came, and she sat down, pulling the child roughly to her. "Now that I've come I shall stay."

"By giving up the shelter I provided for you, you have given up my protection. If you had not left your

lodgings, I should have gone on providing for you. How have you lived all these months during which I have not heard a word of you?"

"I've been living honest, no one could say I have n't," she protested excitedly; "but it's little you knew or cared."

"Lay the child down," he said, pointing to the slippery horsehair couch at the back of the room; "he's dead sleepy, and he need n't hear all that we have to say."

"And it's your own," she said, folding a shawl round the little figure on the sofa; "any other father would be proud of him. You want to know why I went away from where you'd put me; well, I'll tell you," she said, bridling and coming back to her chair. "Do you think I could bear what they said about me and the child, and I an honest woman, too? I might have been the lowest of the low from the way they treated me."

In an instant Repath saw the dull, respectable street with its evil tongues, the dull days and lonely lodgings.

"I could n't bear it, I that had always kept myself to myself, though father did keep a shop, and I might have done so well for myself if I had not married you."

He saw in his mind's eye the cosy back-parlour behind the shop, the plump, prosperous-looking husband she might have had, the little hopes for the ever-coming children, the tiny Paradise of smug prosperity. Her tragedy lay before him in a moment: he saw also the time when he had felt that it was impossible to endure the yoke he had laid upon himself. He thought how he

had drained his slender resources to keep her decently where the stifling body and soul could not wind themselves round him. "So," he heard her going on, in a sort of dream, "I went away where they did n't know us, and then 't was all the same over again. There was the child to give away the story every time. Oh, William, William, can't it be the same with us as it used to be? I can't bear the life else."

"No, it can't," he said hoarsely, but his words deserted him as the poor soul laid her hands on his arm, smoothing it as if she would have softened an iron heart; "it can't."

"But why not? There 's them that have cared for me; you said you did yourself once."

He pulled himself away from her hands with a movement of abhorrence.

She must be made to leave that strain alone.

"You must never talk to me again like that," he said, pulling himself together; "you cannot understand; you never could; and it 's more impossible now than it ever was."

"Then I know what that means," she said, her voice shrilling upwards to its highest tones.

"Leave that alone once and for all," he said sternly.

The strong voice, the overmastering presence, frightened her, and she shrank away with a low cry that would have been a wail but for her dread.

"Do you suppose," he said again, "that your coming here won't be known and understood? But I ought to

have been sure that wherever I was you would come. Why have you come just now?"

"The money had given out, and I can't get work, for there 's the child, and I can't bear to leave him alone all day. Oh, my life, I can't go back to that again, not if you kill me for saying it. I saved enough out of what you sent me to live on without asking you for any more for a time, but it 's gone, and I won't go back. I can't, not if you drive me to it. I wish I 'd never seen you, and I 'm getting to hate the child."

"Stop that," he said, as her crying grew louder and more hysterical; "you will have to go, or I shall allow you nothing. You must understand that whatever consideration I once had for you your own act has destroyed."

"Consideration! if that means leave to drag out my life in a hole, I don't value it much. And let me tell you, if you don't care for what you sought for once, there 's plenty more that do. But I thought I 'd got some respect left for myself, though you have n't any."

"Pray spare me the details. Have I ever shown any desire to interfere with your amusements?"

There was a certain dignity about the quiet that came over the finery-bedecked figure and tear-stained face.

"Now that I 've come to have *that* said to me," she said, picking up the sleeping child, "now that you have said *that* to me, there is n't a penny of your money that I would touch. No, not a penny," she repeated, strug-

gling to hold the child more firmly in her trembling arms. "I 'm sorry we 've eaten your bread, but 't was only the child that did. I could n't put a bit between my lips; I know why it was now."

"What are you going to do?" he asked, his anger driven into a dull edge of vexation at the sight of her drawn, desperate face. "You have no money; you can't go like this."

All the same he opened the sitting-room door and the outer one for the heavily laden figure that stood to him for his lifelong penalty. Could it really be vanishing out of his life; and, still more, could he let it vanish so?

"That can't matter to you," she said, walking steadily out into the snow, without heeding her direction; "perhaps I 'm going to my amusements."

He stood at the gate of the cottage watching the dun-black figure against the whiteness of the winter glory. He could not let her go in this way; a lively, brawling woman with no sensitive respectability would never have played so disastrous a part in his life as this broken, mother-woman, whose wifedom should by rights have been of the most respectable kind possible. Any other woman would have been far less of a weight to him, as he had known perfectly well since he had awoke from his first infatuation.

He watched her pass up the lane, then came back for a hat and prepared to follow her. She was mad with excitement; she was on dangerous ground, too, and for both reasons must go peaceably. His steps were muffled

by the snow, though she would scarcely have heeded any sound in the trance-like state to which she had been reduced.

Once Repath turned his back on the figure he was tracking, for his sense of shame at the helplessness of this hunted creature struck at his bare heart; somehow it seemed worse to be dogging her footsteps than to rage at her, but again the urgency of his anxiety for his own fate, as well as his desire to see that she came to no harm, drove him on in pursuit.

In the still, cold air no tree branch moved, no feathery spear of dry brown grass fluttered as it stood out above the thin snow covering of the meadow-land. Waves of billowy whiteness were formed by the rolling ridges of the fields, because, since the soil was marshy, it had been ploughed in the waved lines known in the Midlands as "landes." Westwards the sun was drawing near the horizon in a blaze of amber amid the cloud waves of gold and brown against a pale background of sky. The outline of its golden heart could only be seen after long gazing, and then the light throbbed, flickering on the eyeballs as if the sun-god would have called his children. From the road the nameless woman watched the radiance, but a tree threw bars of darkness over the glory; these bars troubled her; she wanted the luring light with nothing to check the full pulsation. Clasping the sleeping child closer under her cape, she opened a gate into the field and instinctively moved over the "landes" towards the west. The snow was very thin, and where the

waves of ploughed land sloped westward a day's sunlight had melted the covering till the grass peered out in patches. A flight of birds had alighted, and their course was marked by scattered snow; she noted it all, even the footprints of some animal, rabbit, dog, or sheep, she knew not which, in her townbred ignorance. But the glory in the west claimed her again, and she moved on, paying no heed to her steps, with eyes fixed on the depth of colour that would have been an inferno of light but for the stillness of it.

Thought was all still: her eyes were set in the fixed, far-off gaze of the sleep-walker, for Nature's mercy reaches to the realm of mind as well as of body. The woman saw only the warm, luring light and felt the loneliness of the snowy fields; the wilder animals seek to hide from all eyes when wounded; the mocked and derided human soul sees no pity anywhere but in the loneliness of Nature's wide spaces. Maternity seeks help, for there is hope; but in the pain of the outcast there is no such promise.

Her barely clad feet were soon wet through and through, her dress grew soaked as it trailed behind her, the child's curls caught in the brooch at her neck, but no cold or cry roused her in her westward-moving course. She was moving away from the station, and the evening was coming on; but no thought broke the merciful charm, and her steps were almost as silent as those of the man who followed a few hundred yards behind. Looking neither to left nor right, both went silently, one stealth-

ily. A peace held the mind of one in check; while that of the other was mad with doubt and hesitation. The westward course led straight to 'Light and Come In: it was vengeance that the woman sought; the conclusion was as clear as noonday to Repath. In the turmoil of his thoughts, in the rage that devoured him, he would almost, in the irrelevance of all moments of excitement, have given more to know how she guessed where the treasure was that drew his heart, than to stop the punishment that was coming ever closer to him. He would willingly in that moment have struck her down, but the road was close by, and there might be some quieter way out of the difficulty.

He was gaining on her steps when the mound-like shoulder of the raised railway embankment confronted them both. Would she climb it or open the gate into the road which passed under a bridge just at this point?

The amber of the sun heart had turned to red-gold as the deeper clouds gathered round it; one bar of darkness hid the lower half of the circle, and the cloud bar was rising slowly higher and higher: it was a disappointment, for the throbbing surface of light was becoming smaller moment by moment. With slipping, lurching movements, bending her head forward almost to her feet, the woman somehow pulled herself to the top of the embankment.

The child gave a smothered cry of pain or alarm, and the clattering fall of stones marked the path by which she

had climbed. The noise or the effort broke her trance; the metal lines that caught the light from the west did more. That showed the way. Before the cloud had completely blotted out the glory, the train that in the still air was heard sweeping round a curve would have shut out the red light from her for ever. There was not anything more to do, only to pray that the darkness might come quickly.

Repath tried to shout, tried to move; but as in a dream his strongest efforts seemed to move against immeasurable force, and the muscles of his body refused their office. He felt himself a murderer, knew all the agony of the irremediable, but was powerless. He had drawn in his breath for the panting agony of the last scene when a figure opened the gate, scrambled up the bank, and laid rough hands on the crouching figure. He heard in the stillness the words of the rescuer, and they came damningly.

"Coward," said old Zebedee, standing over the woman by the steel lines when the whirring wheels had passed, "mebbe death 's good enough for the likes of you, but what 's the innocent cheeld done?"

He saw the old man take the crying, shapeless bundle whence the stray curls fluttered; then he, the child's father, turned away, keeping close to the hedge and torn by the bramble arms that sought to hold him. The first sensation was one of relief; the gods had cast the die for him, the worst and best were gone. Zebedee would probably take the pair to 'Light and Come In, but although

all the happiness of his life seemed to hinge on the preventing of this, he could not utter a word to avert the blow. The affair seemed to be in other hands than his; for once old Zebedee played an august part, even that of the arbiter of destiny.

Chapter XVIII

The Mouths of Babes and Sucklings

NEXT midday each tree trunk on its northern side wore a white shroud of driven snow, for the wind had blown with blizzard-like persistence during the night. The north wall at 'Light and Come In had every rough, jutting point capped with a snow crystal, and the snow clouds were gathering again with a sulphurous yellow tinge shining through them over the whiteness left by last night's work. Driving the marshalled clouds before it came the wind, stealing into the warm freshness brought down by the fall of yesterday.

A tiny, shawl-bedraped figure assumed sudden importance in the wide, empty spaces of snow-clad lanes and fields, since it was the only living thing to be seen outside the farm for the moment. His ruddy hair and blood-red flaming cheeks above his huddled drapery formed a pleasant patch of colour for the eyes to rest on. Greatly valiant, but with much difficulty, owing to the unwieldy nature of his clothing, he rolled together a snowball and flung it many inches away from the whitened side of a tree.

A peal of childish laughter thrilled out as Silphine stepped from behind the tree which the Puck-like figure had so bravely bombarded.

The sun shone through the dun clouds for a moment and flamed behind the woman and child with a sudden radiance that showed up the colour of each hair fibre and lit up their skin, so that the welling of the blood within could almost be seen.

Suddenly as the two stood in the direct sunray Silphine saw Repath coming down the road towards the child, who was standing with his back towards the newcomer. She gave a little cry of alarm, not at his sudden arrival, for that was in the order of each day's events, but at the drawn, grey pallor, the bloodless look that a sleepless night of painful thought had left on his face. Then a hot flush of shamefast feeling turned her face rosy as she faced him and remembered all that the presence of the child meant; she hated the idea of an ugly suggestion in the sight of her lover. The next instant pity conquered and she held out her arms to the child, with an indistinct yet powerful impulse to make sure that the small lonely thing should not bear his outcast position alone. The fact that the ruddy urchin knew nothing of his place in others' eyes made no difference to her in the exaltation of the moment.

As she knelt down to hold him in her arms a sudden strain in her grasp or a look in her eyes made the child suddenly turn, and he saw Repath as the latter came doggedly towards them both. There was a question in

Repath's mind, and he knew that the answer to it must come in a moment. Silphine's laughing face answered one part of that question, but he would not have long to wait for the rest.

It was settled the next moment; the scorpion whips our follies weave for us fall with a lash, and the fact that a child's hand wields them make them none the less of power to cut and sting.

It was unmistakable recognition and fear that sprang into the child eyes as, clutching the fur at Silphine's neck, he turned and cried, "Daddy, daddy!" Then there came after a pause, "Mummy's runned away. She was fightened yesterday."

Silphine knelt with her arm round the child, who stood looking backwards and forwards from one to the other with puckered lips that threatened a wail. The tension in the faces above him held him spellbound for several minutes, as it seemed — for many seconds really. The three stood motionless and breathless, while the scene was seared into two brains.

At last Silphine rose with the child in her arms, for she was struck with a feeling of cold, and the nearness of the warm child body gave her comfort. The sight brought a sudden irritation to Repath; it struck him as indecorous that she should stand so.

"Put that child down," he said, coming a step nearer, as if to take him from her.

"Go," said Silphine, loosening his tight-locked arms, "go to the house and ask them to give you some milk.

See," she added, pointing to the farm gates with a shaking hand, "you are n't afraid of the big dog since he licked your face this morning."

Looking backwards with wondering eyes at every few steps, the huddled little bundle ran; he made but slow progress, however, cumbered as he was by clothes and with his footsteps clogged by the snow. Silphine drew back her lips to smile at this quaint shambling run, but her lips were stiff, and the smile seemed to frighten the child as he ran faster and with one last backward look stepped over the low, wooden bar that ran across the foot of the gateway. This was the last they saw of him.

The two who were left stood motionless, while one might have counted the heart-beats. Repath felt that he never wanted to utter another word, and it was Silphine who broke the spell. Her lips were drawn and her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth, but she felt it impossible to stand there as if turned into stone.

"So," she said, lengthening out the syllable to gain some control over her lips, "so, I misunderstood you all the time."

"Not if you thought I loved you. On that point I never deceived you."

"That woman and that child belong to you?" she said, flinging forward a hand towards the gateway under which the child had just disappeared. "She was something to you once, though now she is like a homeless dog."

"Years ago she was something to me, yes." He

shrugged his shoulders wearily, as if sick of the subject, as indeed he was.

"Years hence what should I have been?"

She turned on him fiercely.

"The woman I love—"

"The woman you loved. It 's only a matter of tense to you, but a big matter to your toys."

"I have broken your heart, I suppose, but though I may have gone far to ruin your life some might find excuses for me. She left me long ago, the mother of that child, and I was n't as much of a rascal as some might have been. But you cannot understand, and if you could I would not be the one to make you."

"Broken my heart," she laughed; "hearts don't break so easily. It 's the wrong man I called myself in love with. Never you, not you, the real you. 'T was only the dream you."

"Then it 's all over?"

"It never was."

"Well, I 'm not the first man who 's been punished because he was n't such a rascal as he might have been. You never can have had a spark of love for me," he said, as they turned to reënter the farm, "or you would n't have been so sure of yourself. You woman that I 've never won, where have you waited all this time, when I would have given my soul to gain you?"

She marked the long lines that had graven themselves in his grey face and paid his pain the respect of truth.

"Down," she said slowly, "down where the passion

you knew how to use could never reach. You killed the best in yourself for me years ago. That 's what I must have felt always."

"You cannot understand," he repeated, in such a low tone that the words scarcely reached her. "God knows, I ought never to have come here, Silphine. God knows, I would not had I known. Say a word of good to me before I go," he pleaded. "It 's got to last me a long time, you woman that might have been mine."

She always remembered him in after years as a dark form with a bright snowy background; to such dim shapes do years reduce those who once had such mighty power to stir us.

"Don't think," she said, giving him her hands, "that it is all pain you 've brought me."

"And you forgive?" he said brokenly.

"I forgive," she answered, "whatever there is to forgive."

But the real sting lay to him in the thought of what he had left undone; a power so easily broken had never been a real one.

Chapter XIX

Cupidon begins a Good Work

ROSEMARY lay on her couch close to the fire in the room upstairs; the shaded lamp shed a yellow light through the room, and a big fire flashed its rays on the firm flesh of the naked child who, just out of his bath, frisked away from the wide-grinning maid who sought to cover his Arcadian nudity.

"Come, now, do 'ee, there 's a duck," chuckled Sally, holding up a small garment in what she considered an inviting manner.

But no, once free of the cumbrous shawls in which he had spent a hampered day, he desired to avoid resuming any garments at all. Leaping on Rosemary, he crouched like a small imp on the end of her sofa.

"Hee, hee, hee," remarked he, shaking his curls from side to side.

Just at this juncture the door opened and Nix entered. A tired change had passed over his merry face, but the clouds passed away from it as he heard Rosemary's laugh ring out when she tried in vain to catch the urchin's plump arm.

"Come, Nix," she said, "you can catch him. Sally, you can go. The master will fix him up."

"Fix him up" was a strange term to the naked imp, but he understood the meaning of Nix's smiling advance towards him.

"Did you ever see a child more like Cupid," said Rosemary, "with his roses and his sleekness? I've already found a name for him."

Nix drew near the sofa with hand outstretched, but then did Cupidon lay down his feet and run. Round and round the room, over chairs and under tables he swept, followed by Rosemary's peals of laughter. Nix was, perhaps, a little slow, for the laughs delighted him. Cupidon had wrought a good work on Rosemary, it was evident.

"How can he run like that," she said, "when he's had bowl after bowl of bread and milk?"

His fat little person testified to the truth of this remark, but his flight abated not of its swiftness, though once when Nix laid his grasp on a wisp of flying curls, "Bad man, 'urts," said Cupidon, and disarmed him.

At last, with a sudden stop, he squatted on the floor so close to his pursuer that Nix almost fell over him. Recovering himself, Nix caught up a basket chair, and Cupidon, with his little sides heaving, found himself a prisoner gazing through the wickerwork of the chair with Nix on top of him.

"Let him out, dear," said Rosemary, as the captive with gleaming eyes blinked at her from behind his bars. "He'll catch cold, and he must be getting dreadfully sleepy, though he does n't look it."

"Considering that he has just run three inches of pin into my leg, I should say that his looks speak the truth about his sleepiness."

"Do let him out, Nix, dearest."

"It's long since I heard that from you. Say it again."

"Nix, dearest."

"There, come out, urchin," said he, lifting up the chair high in air, "let's make you a bit decent."

But no, Cupidon flew, just as he was, straight into Rosemary's arms, snuggled up to her, and was soon, or appeared to be, fast asleep.

"Poor little beggar," said Nix, looking down on the two, "he's been like a trussed fowl all day. Why put clothes on him at night?"

"But, Nix, we've borrowed such a nice little suit for him, and he really need not go about in shawls any more. I suppose the woman took his clothes for a remembrance of him."

"Oh, wrap him up, and let him sleep as he is."

So Cupidon again wore a shawl as his sleeping attire.

"You're better to-night," said Nix, heaping up a mass of small garments in search of a chair near the sofa. "Should you like to keep him?" he went on.

"Oh," said Rosemary, raising herself on her elbow and looking down at the sleeping child, "do you think we might?"

She put out her hand to smooth the pink cheek, but drew it back for fear she might awaken him. He was

a very precious possession. Nix's heart rather ached at the sight of her pleasure.

"I think so," he said. "Repath does not know what to do, and he'll have good food and air here, poor little chap. You'd like it?"

"Oh, I should; but what a hateful man that is."

"Oh, I don't know. It's all a deuced bit of bad luck, poor devil. The woman's much worse to have given us the slip as she did."

"Of course, Silphine is just the person to get into all sorts of uncomfortable affairs."

"Ah, well, we've all got a tendency that way, I'm afraid. We'll keep the Cupid, at any rate, for a bit. And let's drop the subject of Repath; we've all had enough of that. He's gone, at any rate."

"With all my heart. I always hated him. I shall love to have Cupidon, though. Fancy not caring for a red, red little child like that. I shall get a Lincoln-green suit for him, and oh, ought n't he to carry a bow and arrows?"

"He'll be a rare plaything for you, little one," said Nix, looking sadly at her pinched face.

"Perhaps he'll make me well again, somehow," said Rosemary.

It was the first time since her illness that she had ever spoken of getting well again, and Nix's heart grew stronger as he thought of the doctor's words that a will to nerve herself was all that was wanted. Little witting of all the hopes, the airy dream children of desire, that

fluttered round him, Cupidon slept with a truculent forefinger stuffed in his wide mouth.

"You ought to see yourself and him," said Nix, looking down at the two.

"No, no, not yet. I can see him, that 's enough."

Since her illness Rosemary had refused to allow a mirror of any sort to be brought into her room, and the only reflecting surface in it was that of the painted vine clusters that winked in the light over the fireplace at the two foolish ones who placed such trust in the hands of a little child, an imp of wayward mischief like Cupidon.

when the pale green shadow comes over the surface like the faint suggestion of a coming event that is only foreshadowed in consciousness; the dark green carpet that had known no scorch of sun merged into rows of young green blades as one came nearer to the field. The sap was rising in the trees, and the shadowy hand was passing over every meanest hedge till the youth of the world laughed at one from each stile. The season cried to the human instinct that seeks change and tries to wring joy out of every moment that passes.

The arrested impulses of her nature cried out in Silphine when the first fiery moment of renunciation was over. Borne on waves of passionate impulse, flung backward by rejection, she had in the first shock of revulsion imagined that the current which had carried her towards surrender had now turned its course back to the source from which it came.

But the spring cried out in her, the young joy of the world that had forgotten it had ever been old seized upon her till sleep forsook her at night, and the birds that sleep all night with open eye had a fellow-watcher. She rose sometimes when the full bird chorus was sounding to wander for miles till the beginning of the human day called her back to the day's work.

Unconsciously, too, the wander instinct was strong in her from her forebears. Silphine's father, the second of Granny Rosdew's sons, had been a sailor, one born with a seashell in his cradle, as the western fancy has it. Half the children in some seaward villages are

claimed by the sea as her due, and in the cradles of such children a seashell is found. James Rosdew had been one of these children, and the sea duly claimed him; he became a merchant seaman, and in a landward holiday met the girl whose vivid colouring and gay strength at once seized the fancy of this eager, dark-eyed wanderer. The two were married after a ten days' courtship, but their child, Silphine, never saw her father, for the sea claimed her own during a stormy voyage down the iron-bound coast between the Bristol Channel and the Land's End. James Rosdew was drowned, and the girl mother, under the shock of the news, lived long enough to bring her child into the world, but not long enough to see her own brightness and James Rosdew's leaping sensibility live again in the offspring of their marriage. Silphine had never seen her father, but she possessed a miniature painted on ivory which the extravagant sailor had ordered to be painted for his sweetheart in the days of their courtship. This picture always hung in Silphine's room, as it had done in her mother's long ago. One day it suddenly struck Silphine what a resemblance there was between her own full-lipped, flame-like face and that of her dead father. Indeed, she was the true child of a sudden passion that had been cooled by no long waiting or more cloying satiety.

Each day she grew, during this restless period, more like the headstrong sailor; had she been a boy the restless fit would have driven her to sea, where the whistle of the wind and the surge of the waters would have sup-

plied a vent for her unrest. Girl as she was, she felt the need to be away from a place where everything spoke of the past.

Rosemary's delight in Cupidon, a joy which was every day making her more like her old self, struck Silphine as something which she could only glance at askance. Cupidon was hopelessly associated with the darker side of life; she thought much of his mother, of why she had left her child, and of what had become of her now. In truth, the very existence of him seemed indecorous; she glanced sideways at him mentally. Her mind began to dwell more and more in the shadowy ways where the outcasts live; those regions were to her like the caves in the Widdicombe valley — places to be shuddered at. The caves were actually present to her whenever she followed in imagination the footsteps of the poor creature who had rested for a night at 'Light and Come In.

What had she heard there? What slights had she received from those who came near her at the old farm which in all the years of its history had seldom, surely, sheltered a sadder life?

Again and again such thoughts came while the bird chorus sounded through her window, but they could bring no rest; the wander grip had too much hold.

One morning, driven out in this way, Silphine stood at the moment when night and day meet, watching Zeb attending to the last-come lambs, near the "barth" or sheep shelter.

The place was a favourite spot of hers; to the right stood a clump of Scotch firs, placed just on the rounded summit of a mound, where the wind could play. The faintest breeze just there sent a murmur through the firs, and on windy days the soughing of the trees was a thing to long for on the level plain. Silphine's weary heart had driven her out this morning to the spot where she remembered to have lain one long, cloud-scudding morning listening to the wind in the trees and watching the grey, placid, expectant mothers lying in wool-clad peace all around her, uttering only from time to time a long ba-a-a that seemed like a sentinel's word passed along in the stillness. "All's well," said the woolly mothers. "Be at ease," sang the wind sough. Of heartsome ease and the sunny peace that one must have been a worker to enjoy, two sounds in nature speak most clearly,—the susurrus of the trees on a height and the lark's song to his mate.

But this morning there was no breath of wind to stir even the faintest sigh among the trees, for the purple dawn that brings a wind with it had given place to a misty, creeping twilight, wherein a halo of vapour gathered round each solid body and formed tiny drops of moisture on it. The sheep, too, were no longer placid and expectant, but round each misty, shaggy shape the quivering, sucking young ones crowded, each with its grey halo merged in the vapour that framed the mother. Silphine leant over the gate watching the anxious scene. She preferred the ugliness of the waiting

mothers to the excitable bustle of these worried creatures, much harried by the pushing lips and by the "baggering" ministrations of Zeb.

"Early you be, missie," said he, always glad of an excuse for not continuing his work. "Warm bed's better for 'ee too, a young maid all in the flower of life, as you mid say. Cruel bad it be for the rheumatics, this here mist. Gets most into a man's very bones and marrow, as saith the Scriptures."

"Yes," said Silphine, regarding the wrinkled face that looked as if the puzzle of the universe had left its perplexity on it in visible form; "yes, you can't see the hills, and there is n't a ripple of wind."

Their voices seemed caught in some wool-like substance that muffled sound. Gossamer webs had formed over the bulbous turnip roots.

"Not that I mind seeing no hills," said Zeb. "Darn the hills, say I, and give me a day that don't twist 'ee. But it 'll clear afore the forenoon 's over, and then you 'll see the hills — not that they 'm much to look upon. Poor trade, I call 'em, up one side upon purpose to go down t' other. That's all I can see in hills. Give me flat uns, say I."

"But bonfires would n't show up on flat ones."

"Fires, saith a! Fires! You should ha' seen the Beltain fires, the old ancient ones, lit. I 'll tell 'ee fine tales o' they. Lighted them up, they did, till what with the welter of sun by day and the burning, roaring fires by night a body was most nigh sweated down to his bones, I 'll warn. Did 'em good, too."

"What were the fires for, Zeb?"

"Well, 't was like this here: the summer do set 'ee on fire, and the old, ancient ones that lived back along used to like to kape it up by night so well as by day. Ay, there's other things than heat spots that the summer's got to answer for," said Zeb, watching the wraith-like, gnawing beasts.

"I've heard of the old St. John's Eve fires. That's what you mean, is n't it?"

"Iss, that's of 'em. Beltain fires, they called 'em; but that's give up since my time."

Silphine thought of the tors, granite-peaked, rising from the bogs and the bracken slopes, with the Bel-fires flaming out to the sungod. It was evidently part of a ritual that knew some of the secrets of these hearts of ours.

"Iss," resumed Zeb, "summer is a-coming in, as they say down along. I reckon 't was that got into Sal Stooks t' other day, that her traipsed off with a sojer. Got the summer in the blood, I'll go bail."

"Sal Stooks!" said Silphine. "I know that girl."

"Daughter of Sam Stooks, that was married to a bed-lier [invalid] and had but the one cheeld. Lordy, whatever goose have 'ee been cooking not to hear upon Sal and the sojer? But there, you've been like Solomon, a-taken up with better things," added he politely.

"But tell me about it, Zeb."

"Well, the old man, being as he was married to a bed-lier, had to turn to and rear fowls for market. Sal

was a good hand at the cramming, but bimeby Stooks seed a long-legged sojer chap hanging round. Stooks, he put it to 'en clear that he 'd have to sheer off, and the old man reckoned he 'd gone. But, if you 'll believe me, that there maid ups and off with the chap on a Friday — and Friday was killing day. On the Saturday the old man went driving the donkey along like one mazed, for he 'd been up all night dealing with the carcasses of they fowls, and al la said as a went along was, 'If it had n't a bin a Friday, it would n't a bin so bad — if it had n't a bin a Friday, it would n't a bin so bad.' "

"But the loss of the daughter was the worst part, I suppose?"

"Oh, I don't know. 'T was the fowls that weighed heaviest, not the daughter. Say her 'd lit out on a Saturday and run, he could have got help against next week's killing; but there, 't was in the nature of the maid to let out, and that upon a Friday; and you can't go against nature, and so I put it to 'en," continued he after a pause.

"I suppose that was when he said he 'd put a stick about your back," said Silphine, recalling the end of a story she had heard from Nix.

"Ah, there 's no telling about that," said Zeb, with reticence, "a 'd been going round and round in his mind with cramming Monday, Toosday, Wednesday, Thursday, killing Friday, selling Saturday, sleeping Sunday, that a was like a mazed hen. Round and round a went, till a jog to 'en was upsetting to the mind. I

don't say a did n't let out at somebody, but I'm a trifle hard of hearing time and again."

Sal Stooks was evidently a kindred spirit to herself, thought Silphine, as Zeb gave a comprehensive glance at the sheep and felt that he must be stepping along to other duties; minus the sojer Silphine felt that there would soon be a "letting out" from 'Light and Come In.

Some days later her longing expressed itself to Nix as they took an evening stroll in the garden below the bowling green. In this pleasant spot year by year the same old roots sent up stunted flowers, while the moss on the paths and tree trunks alone seemed to flourish, for the roots of the old trees had made beneath the ground a network that sucked away the nourishment from the plants. So aged seemed the place that a thrush's song seemed to belong to another age, when the box-trees, now shapeless, were young in vigour. There had come a sudden light that evening when the cloud weights scattered just at the oncoming of night. The wide-flung light gave Silphine courage for her purpose as she drew Nix out into the company of the box-trees.

He followed Silphine down a narrow path where two could not walk abreast and where the middle of the path curved to a saddleback.

"I want you to let me go away," said Silphine. "You will be able to manage now, for Sally knows how things ought to be, and Rosemary does not want me now that she has Cupidon."

"Where do you want to go — back to Widdicombe?"

said Nix, with a puzzled frown. He had been expecting this for some time, still the announcement took him by surprise, for he had a lively sense of his own impotence, this very humble young man.

"No, never," she answered passionately. "I want to go right away where people won't look at me with eyes at the back of their brains, and where I can fight something outside myself. Let me go," she said, as if he held her in an actual grip of steel. The world where a woman feels she is cared for is often but a prison to the dweller in it.

"My dear girl, I don't want to keep you here against your will. Rosemary and I are most thankful for the help you have already been to us, and I only wish to do what is for your own good. The fact is," he went on in a confidential tone, "I 'm a simple sort of chap, — we always are, we Calmadys, — and slow, and I don't like handling dainty things like you women; that 's a fact. You 're too finicky for me to understand, anyway; that 's why I have been afraid to say a word to you about anything. It 's been a weight on my mind for weeks, for I can't help feeling that I 'm partly responsible for what occurred, but — "

"You did n't want to rush in."

"And kick up a dust that would only choke you. I 'm too rough for tangles, but all the same I 'd do a big day's work to help you, and so would the old man."

"I know it, and I 've been very grateful for your silence."

"I thought you would be," said the man of no tact.

"And now," said Silphine, "do me a further service and let me go quietly."

"But where, and to do what? See, you 've done a mort of work for us, as Zeb would say, and you 've never had a stiver from us. You must n't go penniless, let me see to that. You know we 've had pretty fair luck down here."

"No, no, I won't take a penny from you, and besides, I 've something Gran gave me during her lifetime, and have interest coming in sometimes."

Had Nix only known the infinitesimal sum to which that interest amounted he would have forced his point. As it was, he was very uneasy.

"But I can't let you go in this wild-goose manner," he persisted. "I 'm sort of responsible for you, since all this trouble that you 've had has come upon you in my house. I tell you I could beat myself when I look upon it in that light."

"Then don't look at it in that light. Our to-days and to-morrows come from inside of us, and nobody makes them for anyone else."

"I can't let you go like this," he repeated doggedly. Philosophies of life formed no serious content of Nix's mind. "And besides, if I do, Genefer will come and say things to me, strong things," he added meditatively. "Go to her and talk it all over, there 's a good girl; she 's got fifty times more sense than I have."

"That 's why I won't talk to her, but to you," said

Silphine, frankly. "Genefer 's a bit given to keeping her folks in order. I want to go out and make my own way, and I want to learn what to remember and what to forget, and I can't do either here, where I just remember everything."

"I understand that, I felt like that once, I wanted to run amuck and have a free time, but we 've always been a lot that 's had nothing much but sleep in us. We get pretty heavy in the saddle as the years go by. Will you always let me know where you are living, and will you promise to send to me if you are in any trouble or difficulty? I 'll send for Genefer if you don't promise it."

"I promise," said Silphine, with a sigh of relief. She had always been so much in leading strings that it hardly occurred to her that he had no real right to prevent her going.

"Where is he, do you know?" she whispered, as the darkness of the trees that shaded the gate gave her courage.

"Yes, I know," said Nix, shortly. He resented the question as an impropriety. As a matter of fact Nix had a letter from Repath in his pocket, by which it seemed that the writer knew Silphine would leave 'Light and Come In.

A momentary suspicion flashed across Nix's mind, but he dismissed it as beneath contempt; besides, with a certain coarseness of fibre, Repath had suggested that he should come back to the farm to work out the months of his original engagement.

"Does he know where she is?" asked Silphine.

"His wife, yes; he has traced her. She is his wife, you know."

"I know."

"And does she wish Cupidon to stay here?"

"I believe so. At any rate, he will stay for the present. I think he is going to make a great difference to Rosemary. I have not seen her so excited for a long time as she was over his green and brown suit. Yes, we must try to keep him for her sake."

The ruddy-haired figure in Lincoln green, with the Puckishness he had still further developed in the good air of the farm, seemed to Silphine to mock her with a will-o'-the wisp-like cunning.

At any rate, in a few hours now she would be free to try all things new and unexpected and to loosen the bonds of old recollections where all the past was a weariness. A few days sufficed for preparations, which she felt to be guilty, since Genefer was kept in ignorance of what was intended; to Rosemary it was a matter of indifference, for she merely supposed that Silphine was going to do something uncomfortable, and as that was the part evidently allotted to her by Providence, it was best that she should get it over quickly. Now that Repath had also gone it was unimportant to her whether Silphine went or stayed.

CHAPTER XXI

At the Foot of the Mountains

DURING the summer of that year the heavy night dews which covered the meadows with a sheen of moisture that flashed mother of pearl tints at the sun-rising were followed day after day by hours of sunlight which dried up the moorland streams till they dwindled to a thread, while the trout only lurked in deep pools. Old wells began to give out, and the hard-baked earth felt furnace-like, while at midday the grasshoppers ceased for the burden of the heat.

The sun had his will of the weak things that love shade, but as the summer passed onwards in fierce strength, and the reapers grew rich on the harvest pay, the mists of the night and morning encroached more and more on the daytime till the distances, even at midday, wore a blue-grey dimness over what had been purple a week ago. Colonnades of trees had shafts of mist between them till the air seemed in itself to possess a colour that blotted out the green and blues of the earth.

In the garden at 'Light and Come In the shafts of mist imparted mystery and distance to the box-trees, planted in some year by hands that were now dust.

The subdued dimness, where the sun was felt only through the vapour wreaths, produced a sleepy well-being that made one long for the deep sleep the wood gods gave of old to their worshippers. Rosemary's couch was drawn up under the old wall patched with yellow lichen and filled, wherever the moss had not encroached, with wild maidenhair.

Just now she was watching Cupidon as he flitted from bush to bush with mouth well stained with raspberries. The red of his curls as he chased the small blue butterflies only seen in very hot summers flashed across the blue-grey underneath the trees. Rosemary found herself lazily moving her head to and fro to watch him; of this he was perfectly aware. Presently, with a warwhoop that sounded like the buzz of an irritated insect, he flew through the doorway into the house. As long as he went in that direction Rosemary felt no anxiety; it was on the downward slope of the garden that the danger lay, for there the shelving ground suddenly ceased in a moat over the edges of which the elms stretched their branches; the water was now low and black mud marked the course it took in winter through the green shady place, where kingcups grew in spring.

Presently Cupidon appeared at the foot of her sofa; he had prepared a punishment for the spying on him, for he had brought out his bow, and the arrow was fitted in when she noticed him. Nix had taught him to shoot, and as the sun glinted on his tossed curls and green

suit he might have been the son of some bygone archer of the greenwood in the days when the yew-trees were the most precious things that grew from English soil. Whizz came the arrow through the air as Rosemary threw up her arm; it fell from the lace at her sleeve and the child pranced off in joy at his success.

He flew towards the elms, in among the dimness, and with a pang of alarm she saw that the imp was struggling into the lower branches of the elm on which Nix had often swung him and which hung close to the ground from the weight of the many human birds it had carried. Presently he clasped the trunk and placed his foot on the branch that stretched over the moat, which lay twelve feet below deep in mud and stones. At Rosemary's cry he laughed and slowly drew the other foot on to the branch he had chosen.

With a leap of the hidden forces that Nature keeps in reserve for powerful need, she stumbled across the garden with her arms outstretched. She was even in her fear conscious of the tightness of the sleeves of her dress. It was the worst thing she could have done, for in the fright of seeing Rosemary move quickly, Cupidon, who had by this time crept halfway out on the slender branch, lost his balance and fell. From sheer shock he uttered no cry; there was a tremor of the little green hump on the stones, but no sound, and Rosemary knelt on the edge, waiting for a cry from him. She had no power to call out, and the two might have stayed thus for a long while had not Nix arrived to look for them.

The little body fell back limply against his arm, and the sharp angle made by the left hand as it hung showed that the arm was broken. But the child was alive and Nix called up to Rosemary, —

"He 's only stunned. 'T is but a little distance."

For the first time in her life Rosemary lived entirely in someone else as she leaned over the mud-stained, broken body, which Nix carried into Sir Walter's room, and which she followed, as free of thought for her own weakness as if she had always walked like other people.

It suddenly dawned on Nix, as they tried to restore Cupidon to consciousness, that the little man had wrought a miracle.

"Why," he said, "you walked in here! Good heavens! how did you manage it?"

She had always insisted on being carried for small distances before, or had only limped at the most a yard or two, and then she needed to lean on someone's arm.

"Oh, don't, don't speak to me," she sobbed, as if he had laid a lash on her back.

It seemed for some hours as if Cupidon's concussion was going to prove fatal, but the health in vein and organ won the day, though it was a very battered Cupidon that crept about the house.

He became thoughtful, moreover, getting inquisitive as to the antecedents of the stories which Rosemary told him. She took them from the Bible just now, as if her Hebraism felt them to be the only tales suitable for a wanderer near the shadow world.

"There's a lot of dead uns," he remarked, after he had been assured that in this life he would never meet either Balaam or the fascinating ass. That night he insisted on sending his love to the dead, not excluding the unfortunate ass. This he anxiously impressed on Rosemary, regarding her as the means of communication with dead heroes.

In the meanwhile Rosemary, like ghosts, "walked." At first, and especially if Nix were watching her, each foot was put down carefully, and she would touch the furniture that she passed. Out of doors she was more timid, appearing to feel the earth slipping away from her in its motion through space.

"Rosemary," said Nix, curiously, "did you know you could walk at all that day when you flew across the garden?"

A flush rose to her cheeks. "Well," she said, "you know it hurt me dreadfully, but I could have done it more, only —"

"Only what?" said Nix, with a sigh. He was beginning to know Rosemary.

"Only you were so taken up with Silphine and anything but me, that —"

"That you wanted to get all the attention you could."

"Did n't it ever occur to you," he said quietly, after a pause, "that you might be making me suffer unnecessarily? That I might have had a hard enough battle here without feeling that I had a helpless wife?"

Rosemary had drawn in her lip in a way that showed a certain inward tension, not belied by her quivering nostrils; but Nix disregarded danger signals.

"You don't understand me at all," said Rosemary.

"Only too well, my dear."

"At first," said she, making an effort after composure, "they would n't let me, and then I got so tired if I moved that it seemed hopeless to try to do it."

"Yes, I see," said Nix, indifferently. His reaction from the tension of anxiety for her, Rosemary took for pure dislike.

She was now in that mood in which women say of themselves the very worst truths that could be recorded by the most damning record in existence.

"It was true. I could n't walk at first, and then, when I knew myself to be strong enough — but I don't intend to speak to the deaf."

Nix had turned away from her.

"I am listening," he said. There seemed a gulf between them, for the thin line that divides the personalties even of those who love was galling in its fret and jar.

"Once you loved me for my looks."

"Don't you think a man can get below that, or above it, whichever you like to call it?" said Nix, bitterly.

"I don't know what you mean," said Rosemary, with a shrug. There lay the tragedy — she did not.

"When the time passes, little woman," he said, try-

ing to control his ill-temper, "a man loves for something more than dark eyes or bright hair."

"But if there is n't anything but that?"

But a chapter of revelations is somewhat indecent to the average man.

"Little one," said he, "don't let us play at a silly game. You deceived me just a bit, that 's all."

"No, that is n't all," she persisted, with that desire for needless speech which has pursued Eve ever since that unfortunate interview with the serpent. "You seemed to care when I was ill, so I stayed ill, else you would only have thought, everyone of you, of nothing but Silphine. She could talk and charm you, I could n't."

"But you could make me suffer for you? Well, Rosemary, I accept the task of suffering for you."

"Nix, I 'm sorry."

Genefer had never heard that once in all the years she had known Rosemary. If the milestones on Nix's journey of life were going to be rather far apart, it was the right road after all both for himself and Rosemary, and there 's wonderful consolation in that for simple folk. Of the selflessness that can merge itself in another's life she had not possessed a trace, but she found this power, the first on the soul's journey, in a child. Eve would never have had time for the serpent episode if she had already started a nursery, whereby the world might have been saved a good deal of trouble.

CHAPTER XXII

The Weaving of the Shuttle

THE centrifugal force of human interaction, that explosive superior to cordite, had scattered to the four quarters of the globe the actors in the triple comedy that had been played at 'Light and Come In. For the year during which they remained apart Repath constantly expected to hear that the remaining two had obeyed the other human influence, — that force of gravitation called commonly the way of a man and a maid. When he found that such was not the case, and that month after month passed and still Nix wrote of Silphine at work at divers obscure tasks, the dramatic impulse, perhaps the strongest force of his nature, began to assert itself in Repath; the part he felt most fitted to play was the heroic one of the god from the machine. The principle of atonement has always been popular, especially when one can gain the satisfaction of playing the part in one's own person; when "earthly things made even atone together," the spectacle is soothing to our self-love, if they atone through the work of our own hands. The fact that Repath was personally more a disciple of the Rubaiyat than of the Hebrew Scriptures, and that the

Persian looks rather to the weaving of the shuttle of fate than to human action for the settlement of life, was no bar to prevent his interfering between Silphine and John Saxon. In this land, remote from the practical east, every man appears to seek the creed that will least accord with his actions, so that no discrepancy between act and ideal can justly trouble anyone. Therefore Repath set out once more to play the part of fate, this time consciously. He had at least one great gift of the actor, that of realising the life of another, if not entirely, yet partially. The spectacle of Silphine working out her own salvation by toil and fight, apart from the work and joy of sex, was simply unthinkable; it could only lead, not to salvation, but to ruin. Woman apart from man; the lamp unlit, the bowl undrained, annihilation: an impossible position for such a typical woman; of the dim vast tracks of capacity in Silphine to which in feeble measure and stumblingly John Saxon had reached, he guessed enough to know that Silphine's rejection of himself rested on the solid facts of his nature and hers. Therefore John Saxon was the man and John Saxon must be seen and tackled and led to see the truth; the fitness of things demanded in Repath's eyes his interference. Therefore he set out from the north, where he had been waiting, to make certain inquiries from Nix and others.

Meanwhile he whom he sought had gone forth in the welter of London life to seek the kingdom of fulfilment for his own powers and had found instead failure. There

is a vampire-like power for some men in the struggling crowds of great cities; there, not self-confidence alone, but even the capacity for quiet work, seems to desert them, and men who radiate vitality in your country town become enervated like half dead flies in the bustle and push which they came to share and which now merely paralyses. Such had been the case with Saxon; a Cornish mother, even one with a sense of humour, had not been able to save him from the effects of the paternal East Anglian ancestry. In the peaceful home atmosphere, where everybody slept o' nights and came down to breakfast with an owlishness of mien only to be dispelled by four cups each of strong tea, John had seemed charged with an alarming amount of electric energy; put in the midst of nervously active townsfolk bent on getting somewhither with no loss of time, he sank into an apathy almost trance-like in its power; what ought to have been stimulus was a narcotic.

When the work which had called him to town was done, he drifted into casual jobs of teaching at Technical and Polytechnic schools, which, from the rapid way in which they ceased, seemed likely to land him in a casual ward. Once, indeed, for a month, he acted as secretary to an agitator, but could not bear to remain at anyone's beck and call; in short he preferred the shallows of life to a constant buffeting against the sharp crags that bound the sea of success.

This downward course had been accelerated by the blow to his dignity which his desertion by Silphine had

inflicted on him. He had calculated on the certainty of her fidelity as trustingly as a sailor on the instruments by which he steers; unfortunately both women and instruments are liable to electric disturbances. Further, he had settled her future, as might Jove that of the ant beneath his footstool, till lo! the ant reared and the footstool was overthrown. Then, suddenly, Jove found the ant desirable, yea, sweeter than the honeycomb, because out of reach. It is not surprising that the birth of this germ of real love, in one born at least on one side within the Celtic borderland, was followed by gloom, incapacity for work, finally by illness and poverty; the car speeding rapidly downhill. A god from the machine was indeed sadly to seek, not for Silphine, but for John Saxon; the modern machine god can, however, only appeal to that under self that weaves our dreams and ultimately decides our future. John Saxon's under self was intact, though at first sight one had small reason to think so.

He began to regard London as an unsuccessful zoölogical garden, where the beasts tread their cages, three feet by four, up and down, struggling with unfulfilled instincts, but with this difference, that food and shelter often fail the beasts in the larger garden. The smoke area became an inferno from which he could not escape, the reek of the streets clung ever to his nostrils and added bodily torments, for either the smoke or the dust of the wooden pavements racked him with asthma till he choked through the hot nights, longing for pain instead of this gasping for breath. The daily waking, after the

two hours' sleep gained in the dawn, to the monotony of mechanical labour, for he was now working as cashier in a store, became a terrible event, to be avoided by tumbling out, half asleep, lest the torture of it come slowly to burning eyelids and weary brain. But the evenings were worse, for then he realised the real inwardness of failure, when, worn out by sleeplessness and toil, he tried hour after hour to use the faculties of reason. The instinct for work without the power had come back to him, which is as near damnation as one can get this side of Jordan. During his work at the Social History Series, with which he had begun his London career, he had collected notes for a volume on the condition of the agricultural labourer in different periods. The £50 gained as a prize in his Widdicombe days from the Economic Society, and given to encourage research, had been spent long ago, but the work which was to have been masterly, as all unwritten works are, remained a chaotic mass of suggestions. He often wondered why he had not given up long ago; in the good time, when fairly well-paid, self-respecting, intellectual work was his, he had failed to accomplish his task; now fallen, sunken, wearied, how could he hope to snatch success in the face of failure, when all the conditions of his life were depressing in the extreme? Unknown to himself, there was a trust in his own ultimate success; at the last he would not fail, a long last, maybe, but the farther off the more credible to himself, for the man who could not believe that the article he posted to-night for an evening

paper would be accepted had the conviction that some day a work of first-class calibre by him would be reviewed in the great journals. In the meanwhile he kept accounts in a store, and had not written the first chapter of his book, but merely sat, red-eyed and choking, holding burning matches till they scorched his finger, in order to recall his wandering thoughts to the paragraph with which he was struggling. Then memory failed. The Saxon half of him wanted to know things, and he set about learning Norwegian and Icelandic; little notebooks of words lay on his desk at the stores, but he never learnt twelve words for two consecutive days; comparative philology could not be for a man who failed to learn in several hours a few words that ought to have been the task of as many minutes. He asked himself why he went on struggling for a weekly wage that left back bare and belly empty after a few shillings spent in books and papers. Why did he live among a crowd that read garbage, ate garbage, and loved idiocy in its amusements? They seemed to his jaundiced eyes, these shop-hands and their womenfolk, the "poltergeists" of incarnate human beings, delighting, like their prototypes in the spirit-world, in brainless pranks that lacked the quaintness of monkey tricks. He passed whole days without opening his lips, save to answer a necessary question, and would have been dismissed long ago had not the perfect accuracy of his account-keeping made him as reliable as an automatic ready reckoner. In the days of his Cambridge work he had been noted for his extraordinary ex-

actness, a gift of little value to the abstract mathematical worker, but much more useful now than any flights of imaginative genius — if it be useful to keep a feeble body united to a despairing mind. Never a quite despairing one, however, for with men failing and dying all round, he believed, deep down in himself, that he could neither fail nor die; though as a thinking being he might see little reason to believe in an eternity for himself, yet as an instinctive being, he never really doubted the existence of one for himself; like the Italian people, he despaired not of himself.

This was the man Repath went out to meet and found, according to the landlady's directions, in the street at a certain hour, going home to an evening of match-burning. Saxon's fingers had indeed often puzzled the shopmen, for they were not yellow-stained cigarette-smokers' fingers, though at first they suggested it. This was an era of private detective stories, and the "poltergeists" grew quite intellectual through a course of detective work on their own account.

Into the sun-baked, gritty streets, where the brick walls were giving out into the heated air the fire they had absorbed during the day, the workers poured from the shops, boys whistling shrilly as they forged along, eager to get out of the house of bondage, older men plodding or hustling one another, as their health prompted them. The time during which they really lived in the twenty-four hours was theirs at last, and they were eager to use the opportunity given them at the end of the day when

weariness, at least in the older, was mastering the hunger for pleasure.

The first announcement of his name by Repath left John partially stunned. They walked in silence through the broader, shop-lined streets, through long rows of quieter rows, where the jerry-builder had been carrying out the worship of cheap ugliness, to a bare breast of hill where colour of any sort there was none, only the sameness of earth and sand where once grass may have grown, only in days that were very far off. Heaps of builders' refuse marked the sordidness like leprous sores, for where the men of old built bastioned walls to keep away their foes, we now hedge our cities round with desolation. One sees in these waste places why women so love colour; sheer absence of brightness has become pain.

Mechanically John Saxon must have found his way to a seat, for when he came to himself he found Repath seated by his side and asking whether he were ill. For a moment he wondered idly who was supposed to be ill; hearing nothing of the preliminary explanations, his brain began repeating the lines which rings of children were singing round them, — the lines of the song called "Sweet Echo." Over and over again they buzzed in his brain, —

> "My name is sweet Nelly,
> My age is sixteen,
> My father's a farmer at Kensal Green —"

Then a sudden outburst, after words which he had not caught, —

"Run away, cock sparrows."

And the round began again with the singsong that maddened, —

"My father's a farmer at Kensal Green."

A grave-digger, more likely, he supposed.

At last, with a violent wrench, he pulled himself together. The story, which he had imagined closed, came back, and with it a staggering gasp for breath that reminded him of his experiences somewhere about 3 A. M. every night.

"What is it, man?" asked Repath, feeling inclined to shake the fellow into sensibility. "I startled you, I suppose."

He wondered, indeed, whether this apparition were the man he had been looking for.

"Do you know who I am, when I tell you that my name is Repath?"

"Ay, I know," said John; "at 'Light and Come In I heard of you last."

His voice turned gratingly on its hinges, like a long unopened door. As a matter of fact his jaws were stiff, for he had hardly uttered a dozen words to anyone for the day; the "poltergeists" of the shop had learnt to let him alone. Repath drew a deep breath which John envied him.

There was a silence; it seemed to Repath, now that

he had come, impossible to explain the extraordinary nature of his errand. It scarcely seemed sane, but as Saxon scarcely seemed sane himself, perhaps one mad man would understand the other.

"You and I," he began, plunging, "have pretty well succeeded in making a hash of her life, — you know of whom I speak, — and I want to prevent its being a bigger one than it need. Yes, I know," answering a movement of Saxon's, "I know I 'm doing the unheard-of thing. But I 've always hated to see things bungled worse than they need be for want of plain speaking. I counted on your coming back when I cleared."

"I cannot see how speaking will avail, or what I have to do with the matter. She 's yours, and I 'm not the man you should come to, not in common decency."

"She 's no more mine than yours. That I swear. Indeed, if she 's anyone's, she 's yours."

"How dare you come and bandy her name about between us? You — "

John gripped the back of the seat and the bars under his knees to prevent a more febrile outburst.

"Because I won't see her life spoiled, more than it need be, between us two. Man, she 's as unspoiled for me as the day God made her. You must believe me, it 's the naked truth I 'm telling you."

"Then why do you come to me?" said Saxon, after a pause, during which the earth stood still. "She 's nothing to me now."

"And yet do you know where she 's put you? Up

among the notions, the ideals you taught her and left her to starve amongst. You 're a sun myth, by this time, while I 've — been a liberal education to her."

He shivered, though the night was sultry, and drew his coat round him as if there were a wind blowing from the fields of death.

"She never really cared," he went on. "I never met more than a fraction of her nature. I was a spiritual detrimental, and she found it out. If she 'd really cared all round, it would n't have mattered if I 'd had as many wives as a Turk. I 'd have kept her all the same — ay, and satisfied her. But she 'd other sides, and I did n't touch 'em, not anywhere, save the one."

John Saxon, too, shivered now; there was the breath of the dissecting-room about, which would have been far worse had there been present the faintest touch of egotism. "I 'm no idealist. I 'm Ishmael, I 'm *l'homme sensuel moyen*, I 'm the modern French nation, for which *vide* Matthew Arnold, I never fail up to a certain point. But I was wrong, wrong, wrong. I could n't give her ideals, I have n't any. The upward flight to the tableland of righteousness is n't mine. I have n't even begun my pilgrimage there, never shall, and you 'd spoilt her for me long ago."

John Saxon turned; their eyes locked for a moment, then John held out his hand, which the other grasped.

"You 've got it badly," said he.

"I should n't be here else," said Repath, simply.

"I 've known women well, too well, and I know what

her kind suffer, what she's going to suffer, if I don't make an ass of myself. See here, do you know what forcibly to atrophy a limb costs in pain? Yes, you know, we all know, and all around we atrophise our women, starve 'em, tie 'em up to a conventionality, to a respectability. She wants a meaning, a looking-forward, instead of a perpetual backward-looking, inward-looking. What man of us denies himself the fullest satisfaction he can obtain to every side of him? Poverty cramps even him, but by the Nature that made us, poverty 's freedom to what loneliness makes women suffer. No, she sha'n't suffer this, she'd better join the fallen stars than do that, and share their damnation rather than starve a full nature and every vital sense in it."

"I'm not the man," groaned John Saxon, his face in his hands, soiled, as he noted, with the day's grime. "I'm going under, I can't even keep myself clean. My ideals! You, sane, healthy, strong, to talk of them!"

"Ay, and Jacob fell pretty low, time and again," said Repath, turning away, for to eye a man's spiritual humiliation comes perilously near the nameless sin against the Holy Ghost. "But think of her, setting her face to the greyness, to the cold east, to the starvation — that woman!" He stood up with his back to the bowed figure beside him. "Take yourself to a Turkish bath to-night and your broken ideals to her to-morrow — she'll patch them up. Damn it all, man, go!"

John Saxon was left alone; to and fro desire rocked

him till pride got the upper hand. How could he bear to be dragged into port a derelict? The neatness of Repath struck home more than any other superiority; he might have listened with conviction to a sandwich man.

That night the figures of lonely women brought by the darkness added a new terror. The candles he had to supply against these monstrous figures of women's sorrows made a serious item in his expenditure. Particularly there came one picture: the gold-red sun was about to disappear below the horizon, flaming bars of light shone above him and below, on the other side of the roadway lurked the pale disc of the moon, like a plate of faded gold against a lilac background. Two lights they were, set up in the firmament, and for a moment the two lights were together, as it were, twin guardians to proclaim that the ruler slumbers not nor sleeps. It made up a complete testimony of the heavens, and the shiver of the grasshoppers passed from hedge to hedge as a witness to earth's cheer. But there was no need of tortured Christ's figure on a crucifix to remind the spectator of the other side of earth's witness, because of the black-clad woman's form which hurried along, bearing with it a mysterious atmosphere of sorrow.

But he struggled to keep a measure of respect. The Turkish bath was too costly, but he washed his shirts in his basin and dried them on the backs of chairs. If there were any women angels among the angelic hosts they

must surely have wept at the lumbago he earned by the imperfect nature of their airing, since his attic was naturally without a fire. But the woman nearer than the angels he would not seek, while of Repath he saw no more. Ishmael had, apparently, sought the deserts.

Chapter XXIII

A Touch and a Rebound

A YEAR later the shop of Scantlebury Brothers, Drapers and Outfitters of Liskerret, was ablaze with light and resonant with tongues, while from the High Street outside there arose the clamour of a human rookery. It was near closing time, and there was a feverishness about the assistants. Two girls with huge, beruffled heads had snatched a moment when the master's back was turned to speak with their lovers on the doorstep, regardless of the fact that the shop was half full of customers and that at sale time Scantlebury Brothers allowed their assistants a "tinge" or percentage on sales; prospective hats and blouses failed before the thrill of the male voices outside. It was cattle-market day in a west country town and even the high-bosomed, pouch-cheeked girls were getting saucer-eyed after the hot day's work; but the shutters would soon be down and the young farmers were ready on the steps, three or four deep in some places, where the window-lights were less searching. In the Town Hall "Trilby" was to be performed by a travelling company of actors who had been wearily tramping the streets all the afternoon in a search

for lodgings; even temperance hotels fought shy of strolling players, regarding them entirely in the mediæval fashion as vagabonds. White skins and a flamboyant style marked them out clearly enough to broad-backed cottage housewives.

To her fellow-workers in the shop there was something actress-like in the red locks and straight simplicity of Silphine; then, too, she did not "live in," as did all the others whose homes were not in the town itself, since she preferred a three-mile walk along the roads to a room she had hired in the next village. Also, though she was, as they confessed, civil enough, there was in her a certain shrinking from the leading notions of their lives,—as little work as may be, for unskilled labour is joyless, and as much male society as possible, with attendant finery. Miss Rosdew was a bit "touched," though the head did consider her an efficient saleswoman. In truth she suffered less under the lax rule of a country firm, where customers often dropped in to meals with the family and the "girls," than she would have in the automatic rule of a staid town shop. All around were the moors, whence she could see the line of tors at the back of 'Light and Come In, and where was cold, clear air and the granite-born water that made the skin feel like cold velvet. There was indeed a considerable measure of cleanliness in the life for which past experiences had made her thankful, especially since it was only in work hours that she need associate with the girls; the life made a halting stage where she could collect her energies

for fresh struggle. When she left 'Light and Come In she had emerged for the first time from the shelter built for girls of an assured position, with relations to protect and a background of the established order, as dull and as safe as the atmosphere of a great leisurely bank. From this she had deliberately escaped to fight for her own hand, being practically penniless, and this fight had braced and purified her, being, as she was, a strong woman. Thus she understood for the first time the nature of the struggle which a young woman has to wage for life and freedom from molestation. She had gained a place as help in a large, child-crowded family, and soon the worn-out drudge of a wife had dismissed her, not with reproaches, but with sighs, as a woman whose lot was even less tolerable than her own. That experience had been repeated in other forms till the consciousness of being hunted turned for a time all the waters of her peace into blood. Gradually she grasped the truth that it is not all beautiful and defenceless women who suffer thus, for the triple armour of absorbed indifference defends some; everywhere it was a spiritual quality in herself that had threatened her ruin so often. Then, like Job, she called for a potsherd with which to scrape her sores, but the quality was deeper than potsherd could reach. She began to read whatever she could lay hands on — other than "Lady Audley's Secret," which remains the classic of the work-room. One phrase went home in one of her books, — "The only antiseptic is the heroic attitude of mind." Blessing the soul of Passmore Edwards, who had given

the free library, she carried this thought about with her. Certain other words taught her by John Saxon, "notable achievement and strenuous endeavour," came too. Both cleansing fires surely. The volatile western nature in her breasted the homeward-leading hills as one might head a battle charge, and where her ancestresses had probably held devil hunts, she hunted her own nature. Day by day strenuous endeavour was hers, if not notable achievement, as she stood counting out yards of cotton print for canty farmhouse wives or breasting the hills homeward to St. Cleer, whose cross and holy well symbolised the purifying process that was refining her features. She seldom went to church, but the words of a ranter stuck in her memory,—"To go to the verge of deadly sin, to wrestle with doubt, these make a man human." Since the days when neolithic man packed his naked womenfolk into a hole beneath his hut to learn humility, this self-conquest has been taught to women by subjection, that is, to those women who are wives; the other, the man's method, is for women who, unlike the neolithic woman, are husbandless.

An hour later Silphine sat studying from the back of the Public Hall the Hogarth group of laughing faces silhouetted against the drop curtain. She was alone, as she usually preferred to be at leisure times, since in her self-absorbed condition to encourage casual acquaintance was merely to milk the cow of boredom into her own private pail. Suddenly the faces in front of her went out before her eyes, only a gauzy network remained, bright

with sparkling drops like the spiders' webs after rain. She leant forward, grasping the back of the seat in front of her, while the gauze floated as though wind-driven in time with her heart-beats. Slowly she recovered and the faces returned; one standing higher than the others seemed to be searching the room for someone. Perceiving this Silphine cowered back in her place, which was fortunately overshadowed by a gallery. Even with her nature that perpetually foreshadowed misfortune, coming as she apparently did from an ancestry that had more often failed than succeeded, this was a sort of happening she had never expected. She gazed in fascination at the shadow thrown on the curtain, the hooked, almost Jewish nose, but instinctively she sought to avoid the eyes of the real man.

Ten minutes later she heard with thankfulness the sound of her own footsteps on the road and smelt the nutty savour from the hedges; she panted a little, but rather with happiness at her own escape than with fear. She had escaped from the face of danger, but would not inquire too deeply into her own feelings.

Footsteps sounded behind and she shrank within the shadow of the hedge, where the branches intertwined above her; she seemed to have been hearing branches waving in the wind for ages of ages. But before the moment came she knew her effort had been useless and felt no surprise when she felt her hand drawn within someone else's in a fashion she knew well and heard a matter-of-fact voice sound at her ear.

"Well, child, and what's the meaning of this move?" said John Saxon, as they followed the long road winding towards the hills and homewards.

"I didn't know you saw me," she stammered.

"And I knew that you saw me from the way you ran from the hall," he laughed. The last year had helped, even by its dead level of humdrum work, to bring back some of his self-respect. He had not gone under yet; metaphorically he had resumed the Turkish bath, if not the ideals.

"Who told you where I was?" she asked, becoming quieter as she discovered that the place of contact of their two arms was no special seat of feeling.

"Genefer," he said; "but not without great pressure, mind you."

Silphine wondered, as he laughed, what inducements he had used. It had been Genefer's conviction that John Saxon's absence was more to be desired than his presence and people did not usually succeed in altering Genefer's opinions.

"I have been saving up all the year for a tramp down in the west, and I thought I'd look you up on my way back."

As a mere matter of common caution moths should avoid the neighbourhood of lighted candles.

"A long tramp?"

"The fortnight of the shop man. I've joined the noble commercial army."

"You, too."

"Yes, we are in the same line now."

"Just to learn what it 's like, I suppose."

"Just to earn my bread."

It seemed to surprise her little. The air of the valley of humiliation scarcely strikes one as relaxing after a lengthened sojourn in it.

"Then you have n't had my letter?" she said.

"Your letter?"

"Yes, I wrote a few days ago to your address at the settlement where you stayed first."

"No, I have n't had it. Indeed, I never left any address there when I left."

"Promise me," she said, stopping suddenly with a jerk that threw them both out of step, "that you will send for it and then send it back to me unopened."

"Why?" he said, proceeding with his stolid pacing.

"Because now I will say to you what I said in it."

"Say rather that you don't mean to say what you said in it," he answered, with a smile.

"But you will do as I ask, however that may be? All that need be said I can say now." He could feel her shivering.

"Yes, child, yes," he said. "Surely at this time of day you may do or say what you please."

This permission was what she had desired from him all her life, but at the first granting of it a shudder of loneliness seized her. The cutting of the cord which begins independent life would seem to be attended with a measure of pain.

"Is this your way home?" he asked after a silence, during which Silphine longed to withdraw her arm from his, but feared there was an improper confession in such a proceeding.

"Yes," she said curtly.

"And does the road lead uphill all the way?"

"All the way," she answered lightly. Internally the everlasting why oppressed her.

"How do you bear this kind of life?" he asked. "Is n't it very hard for you?"

She plucked up courage to withdraw her hand.

"I can live by it. You don't know how it pleases a woman at first to be independent. I seem to make an advance every time I eat a meal I 've earned for myself. But I 'm rather passing out of that now. I want to do work that means some real help to people. You see I 'm very humble in my hopes."

"But how much better to build from the bottom than to start with the roof as I did."

"But so much of what I do is really useless, and though people must be clothed, we sell so much shoddy that a decent sheep would refuse to wear. I want something real, right down honest. I might wash clothes, but then I should be just taking the bread out of some other woman's mouth. There is n't a place for me, I suppose, so many of us seem left out in the scheme of things. We 're links that don't link anything together."

For all her knowledge of the truth of her words, she was feeling the ease that comes from a common stand-

point of thought, a luxury for which one craves the longer one lacks it.

John Saxon was awake to the fact that this was a different woman from the one who had sat radiant amid the "golden pomp," who had, as he judged, played the wanton. Different, too, far different, was she from the woman of Repath's fancy. And yet what moment of weakness had been betrayed in that letter, the contents of which he would certainly not learn to-night from this self-contained, politically minded creature. Her problems were his, only more hopefully met than his; they were at last together on a standing place common to human beings who feel the need to pay their just debts to the race that has begotten them, however unwisely.

"'T is the parable of the talents over again," he said musingly, as the village lights twinkled under the vaulted dome where the stars were answering the roll-call; "the lot to be sought for as for much fine gold is to have a little half talent and work it to the full."

"But," she said, "there are always ahead the possibilities of the future for those of us who have n't worked out our powers; at any rate, till death drops the curtain. And then, who knows?"

"And sometimes the curtain drops before death," he said bitterly. This was the tone of failure, she knew, and the first wave of a tenderness that had no physical origin shook her momentarily. It seemed then so much more blessed to fail than to succeed, for it was surely less lonely.

"I live here," she said, as they faced the door of a cottage slated down the walls for protection from the wet. On the door hung a text fluttering in the wind. "I will lay me down in peace, for the Lord guardeth my lying down and my rising up," read John, as he caught the fluttering paper between finger and thumb and read with his face close to the paper by the light of the match which Silphine had struck in the doorway.

A coil of her twisted hair had fallen and gleamed like a snake on her black frock; its beauty was in strange, opulent contrast to her hollowed temples and cheeks.

"That means," said Silphine, "that Mrs. Tregemble has gone to bed. She always hangs that up before she goes upstairs. It 's like a charm to her, I believe."

The red curve of loosely hung, reading lips, which was what the match had revealed to her, sent a quiver through her; somehow the atmosphere had changed.

"To keep off the spirits of the air," he said, following her into the room, which the lamp now revealed. Mrs. Tregemble slept hard in more senses than one, and the unplastered ceiling above them resounded with her snores, which the noise of their entry had only interrupted for a second. Silphine wished she had said good-bye outside; there seemed a too intimate domesticity about a conversation punctuated with pig-like snores. However, he had seated himself within the lamp-lit circle thrown on a chequered red cloth as old in her remembrance as the very disc of light from lamp or candle which in babyhood she had called the "canna," or can-

dle, moon. Snores, nightcaps, and "canna moon"; these intimacies in connection with the figure by the lamp shook her self-possession. She pulled down the blind with a rush; outside was the night, and constraining thought inside. What countless bygone women had pulled down blinds to cover the voiceless call of man to woman. But he must find that out for himself; she would give him no assistance.

"Genefer seems very happy and prosperous, and Poppy is trying to do the best for his boys, becoming quite an honest man, in short. I always think it a sign of grace in a school-master when he won't hear of anything cheap for his school."

"Yes, Genefer's very happy since the baby came. She serves the future now; she's a very happy woman."

She caught at her coil of hair and twisted it hastily round; he seemed to see the movement with the back of his head, for without turning he caught her left hand as it fell and drew her forward till she stood leaning over the back of his chair. For a long second they stood thus, till the sleeper above paused, gurgled, and then began again more regularly than ever. The break had startled them apart. Silphine turned away to arrange the red china lions on the mantlepiece. She glanced for a second at the back of his bent head, which somehow seemed to her moth-eaten, as though, should one stroke it, the hair would fly; indeed, there was a circle of baldness already more bald there were drawn lines on his face, as she less lonely seen. He was uglier than ever and more

tired for all his fortnight's sun and sea. Something fluttered within her, like the stir of life in a yellow seed that the west wind has blown upon.

"John," she cried at last, "I did n't — sin as you are thinking I did. Why did you come now if you think of me as you are doing?"

She had sworn to keep silence, but something stronger than resolution drove her. She heard him rise and stand behind her.

"How do you know what I 'm thinking?" he said slowly and hoarsely.

"I know," she answered, "better than if you had said it. You played at training me to match you, and then when I showed that I was a woman and not a stone, you cast me off. You pushed me all shuddering into the darkness, yours and yet not yours — to be any man's prey. Oh, yes, I know I wrote that I did not wish to see you, when granny died; but what man would have cared what I said? And then it was too late. But, oh, my God, my God, he loved me, and that you never did."

She was sobbing now, but under her breath, lest by ill-hap the snoring from above should cease and she gain two listeners in place of one; poverty means close quarters.

"Child, child, don't torture yourself like this. I ought not to have left you alone, but I thought that it was wiser so. I 've always been a poor formalist, there 's something not fully human about me. That 's why I 've failed in everything."

"Better," she said bitterly, "that you had fallen. I should then have been yours, not half-plucked fruit for any man to pull and bite and cast away. A half sin 's worse than a full one any day, when you half sin to save your own precious self or your silly little soul. But I 'm not guilty with respect to this man, as you believe.

"Now go," she said. "You came to see if your cast-off had any power of struggle in it. Well, it has; it 's uphill all the way by your muddling, but I 'm on the path still and mean to stay there. Go, please."

He who had talked glibly in the past had fallen on utter silence of late years, and over the springs of his life thin ice had been forming. By the side of this vitality he felt old, tired; he dumbly supposed there was a physiological reason; his brain must have lost its power of forming fresh convolutions. Dazedly, however, he felt that somehow he had made a woman out of what had been a chaotic mass of possibilities; it was pride in his own achievement, rather than pity for her, that he felt, for he would have given worlds to feel the same flush of passion in his own veins. By her side he felt a cold-blooded fish. But she need not go on lashing herself against one idea which he could remove; there must be some manliness about him somewhere. Pulling himself together, he said:

"You are under a misapprehension. Plague on you," he called to himself, "can't you even use plain words now?

"You are making a mistake," he went on more

firmly. "I know that you are innocent, that Repath was no more to you than I was, that you are more worthy to be a man's wife than nine-tenths of the girls men seek after. I do not wrong you in my thoughts."

Her wrath died instantly. "You are generous," she said, sinking into the chair he had vacated.

"No, no, not generous," he smiled, though he was still struggling with the cold lifelessness he felt. "I knew it long ago. Last year he came to me; when you sent him away and remained alone he felt that ducks and drakes had been made of your life."

"And you discussed my amount of guilt, you two?" She was slowly clasping and unclasping her hands, as the pain seemed to "cream" her, in the old Western phrase. "You got a certificate of good character from him for me, a testimonial, and you had the heart to do that? Please say no more."

He could hardly hear the last words, for they were spoken low to the chequered table.

"Go away, now," she said; "we have cleared up all the mists."

Somehow he went, her quietness being more effective than her passion. True, he murmured something about seeing her again, but it was nothing more than a decency.

When he was gone she pulled up the blind and unlatched the window; the room was full of the savour of wrath and pain.

As she stood battling with her revolt against the man's

attitude of judgment, the snoring overhead sank into the quieter breathing of deeper sleep. Suddenly the booming of guns far out at sea came dully on the wind. The night was still, and the boom, boom, coming overland from a great distance out at sea, filled the quiet room. She remembered her childish terror at a strange booming thus heard in the myrtle valley of Widdicombe in the depth of the night.

The noise seemed to-night to come from the twilight, where dwell our dreams and our hidden fears, and now, as the booming again filled her ears, the ultimate fear was upon her, — the fear of loneliness. North and south of the high tableland where the cottage stood was the sea; from which side the sound came she could not tell, but the child's terror at the unknown was but a presage of this known consciousness that isolation and death are one. The waves of eternity seemed beating on the sandy strip of time, and as the booming died away there came again what is seldom lacking to that same strip of time, — the grotesque: Mrs. Tregemble, half roused from deep sleep by the noise, began once more a-fluting.

CHAPTER XXIV

The Giant's Cup of Gold

JUST about twelve months later, again, the weathered crags of Arthur's Hold lay bare to the burning sunlight of the September afternoon. Smoothly round, clad in short moor-grass and tufted with stunted bracken, the tor grew steeper near the summit till one stood before the stockade formed of huge, oval granite blocks piled breast-high above one another. One mass sprang up, Titan-like, weathered, broken into crannies by the rain and frost of centuries; the topmost layer of this mass was really detached from the lower strata and formed a loggan stone which the touch of a finger would cause to rock, but which a strong push could not move from its poise. This was Arthur's outlook tower, and from it could be seen, to north and south, the magic lines of silvery cloud marking the two seas. Within the bastion of granite and beneath the shade of the rounded oval blocks called Arthur's slippers, the flat surface of the tor, grass-grown, shadow-haunted as the clouds passed over, formed a quiet resting-place. Though the spot was wind-swept above a certain level, yet within the protecting grey masses one could lie and hear the wind whistle from the heights which stretched

mile after mile away to the north coast where trees will not grow save in deep-sunk valleys.

Far into the bowels of Arthur's Hold, the quarries ran where the fresh-cut granite sparkled, but even on the open surface the stone showed no yellow tinge of moss, only a greyness like the patience of a pain which is agelong. Amid the tors the sight of a few trees round a granite farmhouse at the foot seemed to belong to an alien world at whose pettiness the bygone ages of the skin-clad hillmen mocked, as at weaklings creeping closer in the boldness of human want to the giant strongholds.

Tradition associated this spot with the cruel rites of a savage worship wherein the fire of a fiercer sun than we know in these days had been celebrated in the answering fires of still fiercer human lusts. Even now, standing with nothing to remind one of the age in which men grow less stark in sheer iniquity, not seeing the armless cross which stood among the scorched grasses below, at times the grass seemed to quiver with a mute horror as the wind moved with stealthy coldness between the flat lying ready for the sacrifice. But wind and sun make all things sweet and whole; only in dark corners could one find this nestling awe. Otherwise the Hold was a good place in which to dream, though it would never have been chosen as a trysting-place had not a happier association been given to the place by the tale of a giant who appeared on the evening of May day offering a cup of gold to all passers-by. Strangely enough

the grass-grown barrow on the side of the tor had been opened, and in the funeral chamber was found a golden bowl amid the dust of a gigantic form.

Stretched on a flat stone in the shade, with face looking upward into the vault of space, lay Silphine. She was trying to imagine how it would feel to lie shut in from the bee's hum in the heather, far away from it, though it sounded so close beside one. Would one mind the stillness; would one try to knock against the warm earth to the other dead ones in earth's breast? She was living for a time at the farm below, doing some milking and butter-making in the absence of the farmer's daughter on a holiday. The shop-work had exacted its toll in weariness, and when Silphine heard from one of the assistants that her sister wanted to go to London for a few weeks if she could get any one to do her dairy-work, Silphine seized the opportunity to give notice at the shop, to which she could return at the busy winter season, if she so desired. In this thought there was a satisfaction, for few girls had two strings to their bow, two trades, as she had. Dairy-work and shop-work are not generally counted highly skilled, but, all the same, skilled fingers and reason are none too common in any trade. She had got a leverage on the world at last; she had attained that priceless blessing for an emotional woman, — the power of touching life at several points. Considered in this light, every pat of butter made, every yard of cloth sold, was a blow struck. She had gained that greatest joy of the thought-life, — the

sense of taking part in a great brigade of labour, to the roll-call of which she answered for herself. The painful sense of spiritual isolation was dulled by the knowledge that the upward course of the race demands the service of every member of it.

Silphine, turning on her side, watched dreamily a moving speck that started from the farmhouse gate, where in a short time the boy would be calling the cows with their swaying udders, as well as the milker, who now took her afternoon rest on the hillside in preference to the white-washed bedroom, where the goose feathers reeked to heaven.

Long shadows fell on the hillside, in the quiet way that one fancies can be only the sun's way on a sorrowful planet, where the light so often comes in mockery and goes with gladness. A little wind sprang up with the falling of the shadow, — a wind that waved her hair and sent a foxglove swaying. A dream-like feeling fell on Silphine as she watched the ant-like creature in the distance grow into a human shape. She rose from her stone, pulling her oft-washed cotton frock closer to the sweet freshness of her body. She moved from the flat stone into a spot where a sun-ray still lingered, so that the glow of it rested on her hair, on the cowslip favours that her skin showed, in the depths of her eyes. Just now she wanted to look her brightest, for Genefer always seemed to be finding her playing the willow.

"Why didn't you say you were coming?" she called out as Genefer panted up the last part of the slope.

"Because I did n't know myself that I was coming till this morning," said Genefer, still lean and tense like a taut violin-string. She scarcely seemed to relax as she stretched herself out on the grass by Silphine.

"Anything happened?" asked Silphine, lazily twisting a grass-blade in her mouth.

"Something will, if you listen to me," said Genefer, resentfully. "One would think you were a goat to be always scampering over rocks."

"I 've scarcely moved for two hours; there was n't much scamper about me when you saw me first, was there? What is it?"

Her thoughts flew to John Saxon, whom she had not seen since this time last year, but surely Genefer was too practical to concern herself with an episode so certainly closed as that of John Saxon. Genefer's next words showed that this supposition was correct.

"I 've had a letter that gives you a better chance of doing good work than you will get here. I can't stay long, however, for the trap 's waiting to take me back to the station."

"I 'm listening," said Silphine.

"I heard it talked about in Widdicombe that Mr. Ferris, of Beara, who lost his wife this spring, wants someone to keep house for him and look after his children. He 's old, so there won't be any nonsense between you; and he has five motherless lads, the youngest a baby. The eldest is coming to us, but you would still have the four. There 's your work cut out

for you; he 'll pay well, and you 'll be doing something worth doing. If a woman can't be the mother of children herself, her next-best work is looking after someone else's. It 's natural, and it 's therefore satisfying to the woman. How do you like the idea?"

"Why, Genefer, I don't know enough. I might do all sorts of wrong things with little children."

"You could n't do worse than the girl they 've had up to now. She tried salts of lemon for the baby because it was a worry."

"Whatever do you mean?"

"My dear Silphine, you surely know what women do down here when they don't want to be bothered with a child, — their own or someone else's?"

"No, I don't," said Silphine, with horror-stricken eyes; this matter-of-fact tone was worse than the hush of the narrator of a ghost-story, — little grey ghosts of unwanted children, with hate in the eyes all around them.

"Why, they just put a pinch of salts of lemon in their sugar-bags; and the baby sucks and sucks at that, and it does n't trouble them long after that. It eats out their little insides, I suppose. Lots and lots do it hereabouts, married mothers and unmarried, and then send white flowers for the coffin, at the funeral. I 've followed up several, and warned them I 'd get a sentence of manslaughter against them for it. They 're more afraid of me than of an inspector. I 've got other children besides the school and little Isaac to look after, I can tell you. They call me the child's woman in Widdicombe, and

I 'm more proud of my title than a French marshal of his." The school had flourished exceedingly since Genefer joined the staff, and was now practically for both boys and girls, since Genefer had tucked a good many girls into the little boys' classes.

"Genefer, are you sure?"

"Certain. I know all about the girl and the likes of her. You 'll go, then, so that the baby sha'n't get any more salts of lemon. Besides, the man 's had a hard time of it lately. A bitter weed she was, his wife, 'born where the bitter galls do grow,' as Jenny would say. But when you are torn all to bits with racks of pain, it 's either hooting-crying, with you, or else vinegar wine for all concerned. She tried vinegar wine, poor soul."

"I don't care about the man."

"Then all I can say is, my dear, that it is n't like you not to care for that kind of being. But, anyway, I 've settled it."

"You 've settled it?"

"Yes, I have. It 's the best thing you can do. You 'll make lots of difference to those four little souls. Be quick and settle; I must be going almost at once."

"Genefer, you are a hasty soul, but I suppose I must, since you say so," said Silphine, following Genefer down the tor.

"I 've promised you for to-day three weeks; that 'll give you time to settle up here and get some clothes. You must come to Widdicombe first; Beara 's only three

miles from there. You'll have to thank me all your life for giving you a place where you matter. Old maids have such a wretched trick of being useless; and father's never forgiven himself for the Pentecost affair that seemed to bring such an avalanche of worries on you."

Mr. Rosdew's preoccupation with that ancient story was true enough; he remembered the events of that time far more vividly than anything since his retirement from his curacy, as is the case usually with those who are getting ready to cross the river. He handled his old Latin school-books, as of old, for the benefit of certain classes in Poppy's school, in the style in which he had always handled them, generally making the boys word-perfect in translations which they in no way connected with the conveyance of information.

"You matter a good deal where you are?" said Silphine, wistfully.

"The school goes like one o'clock," said Genefer, cheerfully, "though we've only one assistant, — besides father and me. And the boys are as healthy as young trouts, as well they may be with the feeding they get. I bake all the pies and cakes myself, and you don't need to wash the kneading-bowl when I've kneaded a cake, I can tell you, for every bit of flour comes away before I've finished with it."

It was the consummation of a well-spent life.

"And Isaac and you think alike?" asked Silphine, who remembered certain little differences in the past.

"'T is n't alike; it 's the same thought. Look at that," said Genefer, stripping the sleeve off her right arm and showing that muscular, sinewy member. "That's what work has done for me. Before, I had sticks instead of arms. And my mind's the same, though you can't see it. We shall get everything we want in time. Before the child came, I intended to adopt a son, for if Providence does n't drop into your mouth just what you want, why, the best thing is to shake the tree."

"Good old Gen," said Silphine, passing an arm over the bony shoulders and wondering whether the tree in question was not sometimes very difficult to shake; "and Rosemary and Nix?"

"She 'd be all right, if she only had a new man to dangle after her every day. Cupidon 's done some good, but when I make a blanc-mange I don't try to turn it out of an empty mould; that 's what Nature did with Rosemary; and Nix is paying for the old lady's mistake."

Next day, at sunset, Silphine stood looking down on the moor-pool called Dozmare, whither she had been driven by a fit of restlessness that came upon her after the day's work of settling and writing, till she felt as excited as a cat in an east wind bringing with it the scent of valerian. Late as it was when all the arrangements for the day were over, she had tramped miles to look her last upon one of the wildest spots on the Bodmin moors.

There was no sound on the uplands but the lapping

of the waves of the tarn against the boulders that jutted up here and there from the bed. The sinking of the eddies back into the water-level was done stealthily, and the moor-grass, where the lake had overflowed it, bent in like manner. Yet the wind that, even on the very stillest summer day, was never quiet at this height, was blowing steadily, and, lying close against the ground, one could have heard the swirling of it against the breast-like hills all around the pool. In every direction that the eye could reach spread these paps of Cybele, clad here in the russet of bracken, there in the gold of the gorse, with a few stretches of paler yellow, — sometimes even barer still, as if the heave of a great inward strife had driven out the flesh beneath the covering.

Only in one point, away to the west where the sun was setting sullenly in clouds, was the sky-line cut by aught but the great smooth stretches. Here, lying prone, like the petrified remains of an earth monster of the earlier ages, one long jagged line of heights stood forward, looking down on the pool, which gleamed here and there as a ray through the torn clouds touched the surface of the water.

There was no sign of anything living, neither whir of insect, nor smoke of chimney, nor leap of fish. Indeed, though the pool is more than a mile in circumference, no fish has ever dwelt there within the memory of man, and the only creatures that care nothing for the hush are the gulls which sometimes visit it from the far-off sea. But human needs are spoken of even here, far away as

the place seems from all care for the daily bread and the daily warmth, since two peat-ricks, black and square, stood near the edge of the water, — an edge outlined by a reddish scum, like the fluffy sheep-wool cut when the "redding" is just wearing away.

Where the water was shallow, and just beyond the line of foam, lay red shadows in the water, giving it in certain lights a glow, instead of the steel-blue with which it gleamed from a farther distance. The rushes were but stunted that grew on the edge, as if the scum would not allow of any but a niggard growth. There was no visible outlet for the water, and a mystery brooded over it, so that tales are told of the place.

It had been, so they say, a fair estate in years gone by, but an unjust steward had wrested it away from the rightful owner, and a curse had descended upon the place, so that only mountain-water and moor-grass filled up the spot where the fruitful fields had been. Grotesquerie added the final touch, for the pool was haunted by the spirit of the steward doomed for ever to dip up the water with a limpet-shell and much tempted of the devil. The water that filled the lake welled up from a chasm in the centre, which was an opening into the depths of the earth, and which would suck down any boat that came near it, after the manner of a whirlpool. On the western moors, in truth, where the configuration of the earth-surface does not form lochs or tarns, as amongst the craggier northern highlands, and placed practically on the top of a hill, Dozmare, like a Norwegian novel,

confronts one with questions. The story of the unjust steward, by name Jan Tergeagle, is but one of the many answers to these questions.

Sitting down on the heap of granite boulders that marked, like a cairn, the end of a wall, she reflected that it was time to be going on her travels again, and a sense of desolation which was almost a bodily pain came over her.

Suddenly the light faded, and instead of the red sun-ray at which she had been gazing, the dim pallor of the pond remained; still the lonely figure on the cairn stirred not, though the sun-setting should have been the signal for departure. All thought of her own life ceased, and the voices of the place spoke. The wind rose to a moan and stirred the pool beneath, so that with eyes still fixed on the unreflecting water she seemed to be gazing at the sea. Higher and higher the sound of it rose round her, till she was in a very cave of the winds. Shrieking, they tore past, till her breath was stopped by the rush.

As suddenly as it had risen, the wind fell and her eyelids closed at the ceasing of the noise. The sense of loneliness was gone, and there had come in its stead the power of an abiding presence, rose-red, like the grail, with warmth, yet invisible to outward eyes, akin to her own life-force, yet higher because linked with countless other lives; human, yet close bound to the eternal. For a second or two she knew the close linking of man to man, of man to the all-enveloping presence called the divine, limitless, voiceless, yet speaking clearly in moments like

the present. Then the rose-red faded, and in the whiteness beneath her tight-closed, flickering lids there came shapes, black against white, indistinguishable, unknown, till one only was left, — a worn face, asleep, like one laid by through deadly weariness. Someone had need of her, — had had great need, — and had reached her through ways unknown and powers as yet undefined. She knew quite well that the need had been satisfied, and that the one who sought had peace.

Suddenly the veil split into two halves, her eyelids lifted, and she opened her eyes to the moor and a great sense of John Saxon. She knew, as she had not done before, who the sleeper was. There was at this moment a curious haste upon her, who had delayed so long, a thirst to be gone from this spot. Somehow she had a sense of work done, of a peaceful weariness as of a wanderer on the doorstep of home. Inevitable as the coming of death to the death-stricken, of birth to the quickened child, it caused no questioning and excited no fears, for the stars in their courses answer not more calmly to the roll-call than does human fellowship answer the cry of human need when that need is strong enough to make itself heard.

Chapter XXV

The Unconquerable Duty

"AND, indeed, to discover the unconquerable duty of a being is less difficult than one imagines. It is ever to be read in the distinguishing organs, whereto the others are all subordinate. And just as it is written in the tongue, the stomach and mouth of the bee that it must make honey, so it is written in our eyes, our ears, our nerves, our marrow, in every lobe of our head, in the whole nervous system of our body, that we have been created in order to transform all that we absorb of the things of earth into a particular energy, of a quality unique on this globe. I know of no other creature that has thus been fashioned to produce this strange fluid which we call thought, intelligence, understanding, reason, soul, spirit, cerebral power, virtue, goodness, justice, knowledge; for it has a thousand names, though only one essence. To this essence all things within us are sacrificed. . . . It is the most precious, most difficult state to which matter can be raised. . . . Whither it will lead us we know not, or what it will do with us, or become in our hands."

It was a strange place in which to read such words,—words in which are summed up more completely than in

any others the destiny of the future and the record of the past. John Saxon sat with his finger between the pages of the "Life of the Bee," watching how the suburban theatre helps towards the fulfilment of the Maeterlinckian idea. Some weeks before he had lost his work as cashier, and was now all but penniless, save for a magic £50 in the Post-Office Savings-Bank, which he intended to refuse to touch, since it stood to him for the self in the background that could not lose all hope, despair he never so despairingly. He naturally, therefore, sat in the pit; it was a play which never, in those days, failed to draw, and the house was full. The air reeked with the smell of wet clothes clinging to imperfectly washed bodies, and with beery whiffs from the refreshment bar. On the stage before him, under the cloak of religion, appeals were being made to every physical sensation in turn, — a tortured child, martyrs in the arena, the beast-like man whose victim escapes from his intentions by the intervention of a wailing hymn, — all this took the place of the bull-fight or gladiatorial show, and, although more humane to the actor, was scarcely less harmful to the spectators, who howled for the same joy that a little boy feels when he sits on a paling to see a pig killed. Then came the final appeal to sentiment, which fell singularly flat, for the dramatist had put it last, and on bodies stunned with the bludgeon it is useless to try the needle; all the sensibilities of the nervous system are dulled and apathetic.

It was all a parable to John Saxon, for he saw in him-

self the same vacuous face and lack-lustre eyes as in those around him. The misery attendant on modern industrial conditions, the fact that the weak everywhere suffer, which had been at first a trumpet-call to exertion, had at root been merely a pleasurable stimulus; when the audience yelled for joy at the appearance of the hero darting in to the rescue of the virgin, he recognised that he, too, had only wished to play a part as vulgarly splendid, and now no milder, healthier sensations had power to move him. He had blunted the finer sensibilities by what was only, after all, a crude egotism worthy of these howling fools — and himself. Crudity, crudity, the trail of it was over all his doings, a dishonesty in aim that had at last failed to keep him in food and shelter. After he had paid for to-night's supper there was barely enough money in his pocket to pay for a night's lodging. Not sensation alone failed him, but even the nerve to continue mechanical work, though formerly it had soothed him, like the knitting into which a woman clicks all her irritations. Of his book on the condition of the agricultural labourer, he had written the first paragraph six times; over and over again he compared these versions, finding it utterly impossible to go on to the second until he had decided on the first. Among his baggage, now at the station luggage office, there were, besides, many manuscript articles which he kept by him, beautifully typed by his own hand. He felt that in reading them over and feeling how good they were, he derived as much satisfaction as could reasonably be expected from anything literary in a world of unliterary editors.

He wandered, at length, out into the rain, which, coming in cool gusts, felt refreshing to his face, recalling, like the Prodigal, the quiet, roomy house at home, smelling of books, Icelandic and Latin, though probably not of the fatted calf, an animal distinctly alien to the Saxon larder. There were not lacking, too, the harlots of the parable, the wandering stars fallen to damnation: he could almost have rejoiced, had these been real to him; there might then have been some truth in calling himself a living man. At present he was death-in-life; the rain smote deeper through his sodden clothing, striking cold, though it was an August night. He had eaten nothing for hours; the cold marble tables and the sandy or reeking food of the eating-house, which was all that he could afford, revolted him. Under the paving-stones there would have been more rest than in a cheap bed-sitting-room, which would smell of the frying of cheap bacon till next midday. Though fatigue was overpowering him, and dull aches made themselves felt from head to foot, still he could not exert himself to look for shelter. The stuffy pillows, the sheets where anyone might have slept, the potentiality of bacon, — these overwhelmed him.

He had drifted into the middle of a quiet road, when suddenly there was a shout, a roaring in his ears, which changed, as suddenly, to the drip of water over pebbles, to the smell of dank water-weeds. Then he heard a voice call, "The waters are out, and we shall not get through." Then he was carrying the Sacred Host to the dying; through waters, floods, oceans, the drip of

water sounded still. Then wonder ceased, and there was a stillness; he was only now conscious of a scent; it seemed the brackish bitterness of the woodland, distilled from the green life-blood of myriads of leaves.

They carried him to the house of the one friend he had made in these regions, who lived in the same street where he was knocked down. He had perhaps unconsciously been making his way there after leaving the theatre. Three weeks later Dr. Grimwood sat putting the finishing touches to the cure of John Saxon's case. The doctor was white-bearded, patriarchal, full of the lust for ideas which is so hateful to the Englishman. He was also given to assuming that everyone else was possessed of a width of view that nothing could startle. This made him capable of explaining to an orthodox parson that if he had personally any religion, it would be Buddhism; it was also asserted by some that he had been heard to discuss with the unideaed girl the marriage regulations of the Hindus, but this story was not based on good authority. For the rest, he was unworldly, so that his customary ten or a dozen cases barely paid the housekeeping bills. He was markedly successful with nervous cases, far removed from the ken of the ordinary practitioner; he put forth every effort on their behalf, practised every method, eastern or western, and, above all, made no fetich of drugs for the mind diseased. He had given house-room to John Saxon, who had interested him long ago, since their first acquaintance, made origi-

nally at a political meeting and finished in the entrance hall of the Free Library.

The doctor cared not a snap of the fingers for "western physical science": he had long felt the east a-calling in her subtile thought; to him a travelling fakir often seemed to have more valuable knowledge of brain lesions than a Harley Street grandee. Most folks called him charlatan; but the "stink of the east" was the breath of life to him, and west has always called east charlatan. Just now he was encouraging his patient to disburden his mind.

"I seemed to see clearer than ever before, right to the edge of the world," said John Saxon, watching the doctor as he wandered up and down the long dingy room with its double doors flung wide open; no woman servant stayed long in such a house, and the dust lay an inch thick on ancestral decoration.

"There was a mist cleared up between you and —" grunted Dr. Grimwood.

"And what?"

"Blest if I know. You may have seen things that are, or that are not. I can't say. But the state of clear sight that accompanies trance is just like an exaggeration of the clear sight that momentarily follows on deep sleep or deep emotion. 'O that bluer blue, that greener green,' of a love-sick girl. That's why love's delicious at first; the senses are all heightened, in the same way that everything looks clearer after sleep. And the fool critics did n't know what the young man meant."

"Paolo and Francesca, is n't it?"

"To be sure, and Tennyson too, for that matter."

"Doctor," said John, after a pause, "do you know what was a turning-point that brought back my self-control, as I suppose you 'd call it?

"No; what?" said Dr. Grimwood, turning on his heel and standing still; this was an analysing patient, and the doctor sought for facts as one seeking much fine gold.

"Why, seeing these people you 've got in the house, these patients of yours, walking, walking, walking, never keeping still for two minutes together, I found myself walking, walking, for ever, so I stopped it. That was the beginning. I sat still for a quarter of an hour, then for a half, but the first five minutes cost most."

"And the visions?" asked the doctor, forcibly restraining his own restless limbs. "I 'm going on the principle, I suppose," he growled, "that he who drives fat oxen must himself be fat. Now I can't sit still either. But go on about the visions."

"Battalions of the damned and lost, battalions of the saved," said John. "Raphael and Michael at the head of the saved. And one thing surprised me, — there were no wings."

"How did you know 'em apart?"

"By the faces, good and evil stamped plainly on them. I was a Swedenborg for a time and a half."

"Do you like to dwell on all this?"

"I want to go back over the delirium of it and know

that — that was, and this," — he pointed to the room, — "is, and feel quite clear in my mind as to the two phases. You know enough of me to know that I 've made a mess of everything I've tried to do, then I lost myself finally, after losing every thing else."

"I 'm not sure you did n't at last find yourself, and that this uprush of that under-self of yours was n't the very finest thing that could have happened to you — by a miracle. Now harkye. You 've got a will underneath, and that asserted itself, when t' other every-day will of yours failed. It raised you back into self-control, put you on your legs, and set you going again. Maybe it 'll take charge to the end. I think it will. Mind you, I 've seen it done before, but usually with some formula: some have done it by repeating old religious ideas, often that they had n't thought of since childhood. They called it by God's help, and, mind you, there 's a great world-force the mind can draw upon in extreme need; you can call it God's will, if you like. 'Whither shall I go from thy Spirit; or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea.' Ay, they did know a thing or two down in old Judee. That 's the force that sends the life. I 'd have every mother, especially, draw as deeply on it as may be, — the Lords of Life," he repeated dreamily to himself.

He had, perhaps intentionally, touched a hidden spring in his hearer.

"Doctor," said John, rising hastily and peering into

the street with eyes that saw a chequered table-cloth of ancient fashion, instead of the street, "is there any reason why I should n't marry — if I can ever make a livelihood? You know what I mean. You know how much of my illness was caused by concussion and shock and previous distress. Dare I risk the possibility of helpless folks like myself? There 's only one unpardonable sin, — more beings to suffer."

"What like is she?" answered the doctor, with another question.

"A woman."

"Ay, they 're often that, the ——," the doctor was but an unconventional old sinner.

"I 've used her ill."

"Go to her."

"I 've never cared for her before. I 'm not sure about myself now."

"Go to her."

"Crawl to her like an old sick dog?"

"Go to her."

"And I tried to train her for my superb self and let her know it."

"Ah, that 's bad. I 'm not so sure about your reception, but you 'll have to risk it, whether or no."

"But we 've been through all that already."

"And that 's what she 'll never forget. Perfect they come from the hand of nature, every woman that 's a woman is convinced of it."

"And I 've upbraided her with another lover."

"That's no matter at all; she liked it. Go to her and dig in the fields and be the father of ten children, all of them boys and none of them townsmen. And, above all things, mind, you've been down in the pit, but you didn't stay there because you didn't like it—and there's a way out."

"But perhaps she won't have anything to say to me. She's sent me away once before, when I wasn't in so bad a plight as now."

"And how long ago's that?"

"Oh, a matter of over a year."

"And that's twelve months. Where's the time table?" shouted Dr. Grimwood. "Can you go straight to her?"

"No; I must find out where she is. But how can I go, whine for help?

> 'And will not, then, the immortal armies scorn
> The world's poor routed leavings?'"

he quoted half scornfully.

"Not they," answered the doctor, "if there's a woman who ever loved a man in 'em. Besides, that's what we're here for: to taste failure again and again—till we find out what real success is. Besides, underneath you there's a well-knit soul, only go slow, laddie, go slow, and don't try, first along, to carry the world on your shoulders. You're not Atlas. Just try a little woman to begin with. You'll find the world won't weigh so heavy then. Why, the wind among the pines, or the bees among the heather, 's nothing to the rustle of

a little woman's petticuts. More by token, they don't wear 'em now. Perhaps that's why we've lost the old heathenish joy, but I make no doubt the principle's the same, new-fangled fallals or petticuts.

"And she'll make or mar now, same as if she was God Almighty," said the doctor to himself, as he watched his patient from the door, — going forth to complete the cure.

Breaking in on the fateful £50, John booked for Plymouth by the express, but he left the train at Newton Abbot to exchange into a local which stopped at the country stations through South Devon. It was not the way to Widdicombe, for which he must change at Plymouth on to a branch line, but the wind of the spirit had changed. A black cloud of doubt had come between him and the quick decision with which he had started. He wanted to put off the decision; he could not take up again the threads of his connection with Silphine without remembering with apprehension the fret and jar of their last meeting, the length of time since he had seen her. He left the train at a wayside station and walked away, hap-hazard, towards the west and the sun-setting. It was the day, September 10, on which Silphine, away on the Bodmin moors, set out to walk to Dozmare.

A great longing for sleep weighed down his eyelids till the impulse grew overmastering. A small wood which capped a lonely hill rose from the midst of pasture fields; towards this he bent his steps, a dun figure against the golden light falling low over the fields. The grass

on the slope leading to the wood was mossy with age; it was long since a plough had disturbed these sods. He noted this, before he stood, after climbing the fence, within the thick covert; it was probably a huge burial-mound of prehistoric times. Seeking the summit, he came out suddenly on a glade running east and west and cut sharp and clean into the midst of the thickly growing trees. The light dazzled his eyelids, come bat-like from the woody recesses through which he had been clambering. He sank, tired out, on the ground, which he saw was covered with the tiny plants of the wild strawberry, in contrast to the leaf-covered barrenness of the wood around.

When he awoke, hours later, slowly and happily, the stage scenery of his last waking dream was before him: a shaft of light directly overhead, glittering with the points of stars, — "patines of bright gold," he repeated dreamily to himself, with a savouring of the literary fitness of the phrase, which in itself marked the return of health. Then he recalled the strange heliotropism of the dream, in which the shaft of living air above had drawn him perpetually upwards towards the cool depths, whence came a healing wind from vaults of stored-up strength. He was still, he found, lifting his face towards the star-radiance, as though drawn by a gravitation, the spiritual analogue of that which guides the physical universe. The very drawing of breath was a pleasure to the lungs that had laboured so violently in the smoke of town; a cool freshness coursed in his brain, such as comes to the

healthy after long rest; there was also a quickness of hearing which, townsman as he was, made him able to distinguish the sounds made by the wind in the different trees, whose outlines he could discern to left and right. He could not have told, like a naturalist, the different varieties of trees which produced the sounds, but the melody of each was as distinct as the notes of violin and bassoon, when the wind rushes, coming over miles of tossing seas, struck the tree-tops. Although he lay in shelter, the whirl of storm, an early visitor from the southwest, seemed to catch him in its grasp and leave a great silence behind. And with the passing of the wind, like one drowning, he knew for a flashing second or two all the past of his life, the failure of it and the reason; amid all, the form of Silphine. The cool brain, self-poised and confident again, was working to some purpose. Amid the nominally high aims how ignoble had been the reality: he had purposed using this woman as a tool for his own purposes, as a means, not an end in herself. The fact that the uses to which he had intended applying her, body, soul, and brain, were not mean ones, made no excuse; he had never regarded her as a creature made to live no other life but its own. It was a repetition, in another more spiritual form, of the grosser uses to which long generations of men have subjected women. Possibly even, more evil his than theirs, for they only laid robber hands on the body; he had wanted all the quick brain and sensitive heart of her. And those other aims of his? When had he ever cared

to lessen suffering, save to gratify his own pride? A sorrowful planet this, they say, and in no point sadder than in the prostitution of the finest aims to self-satisfaction.

In the service of the unconquerable duty to which he had thought to dedicate himself, fellow-worker with man, he had never yet seen anyone as mere human being, an end in itself, to itself. Somehow never before to-night had he felt, beside, the kinship of other human lives with his own nature: some life, not his own, yet of like nature with it, had charged his being with the electric energy which we call life, and in this momentary power he understood, — he who had never loved one human creature for its own sake before. Women and men, those whom he had used for his own purposes and then pushed aside, as one pushes aside the cup and plate, having dined, — these had helped him, he who had made what should have been the Sacrament of life but the filling of the belly with the husks. He had found the sin against the Holy Ghost: to use men, kin to one's self, as means, not for their own ends.

But the perception faded into peace as he lay listening to the whisper of the leaves and the sweep of the night wind outside his place of rest. He crept nearer to the shelter of the tree at his back, feeling but the hibernating instinct that gives a charm to the coming of autumn and winter to those whose ancestors have lived for ages in northern climes. He much wondered whether the palæolithic dust beneath him had not quickened

to the same sense of pleasure, at warmth and shelter from the coming cold and wet.

Then the wind chorus claimed him again, and, with a smile at the strange throw-back to long-forgotten scholarly joys, he again fell asleep, mentally recalling the lines in which the great master of mystery has enshrined his sense of the wonder of the powers of the air: —

> "Hic vasto rex Aeolus antro
> Luctantis ventos tempestatesque sonoras
> Imperio premit, ac vinclis et carcere frenat.
> Illi indignantes, magno cum murmure, montis
> Circum claustra fremunt: celsa sedet Aeolus arce,
> Sceptra tenens, mollitque animos, et temperat iras."

Chapter XXVI
The Wheel full Circle

ON one side of the roadway the great gold-red sun was just about to disappear below the horizon; flaming bars of light shone above him and below, till the very heart of fiery power was revealed. On the other side lurked the pale disc of the full harvest moon, like a plate of faded gold against a background of lilac, tinged deep down with an undertone of purple. Two lights were they, — the one to rule the day and the other the night; and for a moment the two lights were together in the firmament, as it were twin guardians to proclaim that the ruler slumbers not nor sleeps. It made up a complete picture of the testimony of the heavens. And the shiver of the grasshoppers passed from hedge to hedge and from tuft to tuft as a witness to earth's cheer.

It was the scene of his dream, but there was no sorrowful woman as John Saxon climbed the road winding steeply to the brow of the hill, where stood the farm that was Silphine's new home. Very reluctantly Genefer had given him the name, Beara, vouchsafing no further information, and merely writing the word on a slip of

paper, which she pushed at him as if he were plague-smitten. Dearly would she have liked to refuse his request, but she knew it would have made no difference in the end, as most people in Widdicombe could have told him.

The road he was walking seemed strangely familiar: now there came a granite farmhouse; he had known those "penny-pies" in the wall of it all his life, or so it seemed. It must have been a manor-house, for he knew there was a carved chimney-piece in the living-room. He fully expected the green duckpond that he passed halfway, then the arching branches would meet over a deep cutting, and so it was. At last he stood within the entrance-gate of the yard, deep in straw litter; across it was the "lifting stock" by the door leading to the long stone passage, where the dogs slept; he knew there used to be two of them. To the left was a rocky path into the side garden, where white violets grew, and next to the house-door was the cider-room. He could see in his mind the kegs, fat-bellied, cobwebbed in the gloom. Surely there was an enchantment about the spot, for how had he learnt all this? If one stood in the yard near the lifting stock, one could see straight into the kitchen. He stood thus till the smell of burning wood from the open fireplace reached his nostrils, and with the smell came memory. This picture had been photographed for him before his fifth year; he remembered his delicate childhood and the old doctor who had ordered him to be "turned out to grass" in a farmhouse.

This was the very house, of which he had totally forgotten the name, though no detail of locality had escaped him. He was at home again, and the wheel had come, indeed, full circle to this which was to be an initiation into a new life; he took it for a good omen.

Just now the firelight was flashing in the swiftly coming dusk on a woman stooping forward to lay a fallen log on the fire. Clearly lit up by the consequent leap of the flames, her profile looked ruddy and her hair burnished. He turned his eyes, like a dazed child, to the glittering points made by the highly polished guns fastened to the ceiling, and then back to the brass face of the eight-day clock, which faced the fireplace at the far end. He gripped the wall on which he leant, groping among the red-berried creepers that covered it for the stonework, and wondering irrelevantly what was the name of the plant; the berries had made him sick once, he remembered, but scarcely as sick as he felt now. Something trickled down his nose, and he put up his hand to wipe it away, for the light flickered and wavered, and finally faded to a dull ember glow till he could see nothing but a shadow,—a double shadow, for she was hushing a white bundle which he knew must be a child. He had come too late, and the thought brought him a new strength; he would break every law, human and divine, before the worms had him. Why? Why? Why? The questions buzzed about his ears like a hornet's nest. Then desire shook him: he could feel the marble skin of this woman against

his own; his nails ground into the wall till they worked on to the quick.

But the continuous barking of the chained dogs roused her from a reverie; the child she laid on the settle, and flung up the window, calling to him to know who was there, across the grassplot that separated them.

At her voice the bad moment passed; he would at least have a memory to take away with him. The next moment he had passed the dogs, whose fury, like his own passion, fell into rest at a voice, and stood in the room with both her hands in his.

So still was the room that the faint child-breathing seemed to fill the air, in the intervals of the tick-tack of the old clock measuring out eternity. At last a log cracked and fell, and John let her hands fall. Still neither spoke a word till she tremblingly took up the tongs and stooped over the fire again. He knelt on one knee beside her, till they looked like twin fire-worshippers. The silence continued, till by their joint efforts the flames leapt up again, showing that her cotton sleeve, where it brushed his, was rent; suddenly he forgot the child behind them, saw nothing but the heave of her breathing, heard nothing but the beating of his heart, and the next moment the world was blotted out for both, while great waves of soot fluttered overhead in the square open chimney above them, like the tattered flags of an ancient army, and by and by, as John knew, the stars would come a-shining down into its cavernous, sooty depths. He had often sat, as a child, looking up

to the twinkling points between the waving gonfalons of blackness.

But the child moaned in his sleep, and at the sound she sank back into the low wooden chair, and sat, with her face bowed on her hands, trying to regain the mastery of herself. To be the slave of his touch after all her resolutions! but, all the same, nothing really mattered now. Passion in him, too, was spent, though he knew the legion of devils that awaited him outside this warm, quiet room, full of burnt-wood smell. He stood for a moment with a hand on her hair, though the comb in it irritated him, by preventing a full stroke. Then he said quietly, —

"I must go now. I didn't think you would be so glad to see me."

Still she had not spoken a word, and suddenly it struck him as strange that she should have yielded herself so readily. He was eager to call it wanton, but the memory of past accusations restrained him. So again he had brought her suffering, this time of self-reproach. He crossed to the door and placed a hand on the latch; he knew she was listening keenly, though not a muscle of her body moved. Then he crossed back again to the fire, carefully avoiding a glance at the settle, though the thing on it seemed to fill the room.

"Good-bye," he said; "can't you say a word to me? You've spoken three words since I've been here, and not one since you knew who I was."

She was facing him now, with her whole frame strung

in every fibre to its full power; the air of the room was no longer slumberous.

"As many as you like," she said almost gaily; "but not good-bye, unless you give me better reasons for it than I know of."

"What better reason than that?" he said, pointing to the white patch on the settle.

"That's not my child," she said with a catch of her breath.

"Then you're not married?"

"I might have been married to you years ago, but I was n't. That was perhaps a mistake. Since then I've not married anyone else."

"But how can you? I've been such a prig and a fool, and I drove you to —"

"To play the wanton," said Silphine, with a slow smile; the past had just exactly no fears for her now; "but there is n't any other man for me now, either in this or any other world. I've known that for some time, — ever since the tenth of this month."

He looked at her, and she knew that he understood.

"It must come to 'Wilt thou have this woman?' John, at last," she said, with a smile at the corners of her drooping mouth.

"There is n't any escape for me now," he answered with his own crooked smile.

A moaning wind waved the soot banners in the chimney, and Orion's belt looked in at the window; but the vast wastes from which they shone were no

terror now to Silphine, as they had been in her childhood, when she watched each one come out into the darkness of her window space; the fire that can illumine the coldest depths of human loneliness burned high.

"And we 'll live at Widdicombe, and be very simple together," she said at last.

"And very poor," he answered. But in reality he was thinking of this initiation of his to the priesthood of those who fulfil the "unconquerable duty," which a man can only begin to understand through human love and fellowship.

Frugal Genefer had just extinguished the hall lamp at the schoolhouse when John Saxon reached Widdicombe that evening on his way to the "Dewdrop Inn." He therefore put off his second call on her till the next morning, since he concluded from the darkness that the busy household of Zion House had retired to its well-earned slumbers.

This was usually the happiest hour of Genefer's day, when she was in the habit of meeting Isaac in their own little sitting-room at the back, which looked down towards the Widey, for a discussion of the past events of to-day and the possible events of to-morrow. To-night Genefer stood in the dark hall for a moment, listening to the sound of sleeping, which seemed, to her motherly fancy, to fill the square, well-like place from the rooms above. All her children were gathered in beneath her motherly wing,—her old father, in port

after storm; her own boy and other folks' boys, scarcely less dear. It was a very softened Genefer who stood with her hand on the latch of the door, within which Isaac was waiting for her. A new Isaac, too, in one sense, since this one was allowed his nightly grog. Surely, thought Genefer, the father of her child might drink grog if it so pleased him. The birth of little Isaac had been the apotheosis of big Isaac, though having become scientific in the feeding of her household, Genefer considered that alcohol was not a food at all. Since her family had grown large, and her passion for governing it wisely in proportion, she read many works full of such terms as nitrogenous. Hence there were aberrations in the school dietary, such as an occasional outburst of haricot bean, or similar food stuff, first-class from the scientist's point of view, though not usually much desired of the epicure.

At last she tore herself away from the sense of happy resting which she found in the hall, and opened the sitting-room door. Although in house and school Genefer practically decided most things, she was yet wifely enough in temper by this time to know the restfulness of sharing with good, stolid masculine stupidity the onus of choice between difficult alternatives. The chief mate may be more of a man than the captain, but still the presence of the latter on the bridge is a comfort in storm weather. Genefer had learnt, by less mystic means than Silphine, the comfortable doctrine of human fellowship.

There was only one drawback to Isaac's personal comfort this evening, for he had made the grog to his own taste, and that was the fact that he could not sit on his favourite side of the room, because the French window, in deference to Genefer's prejudice for fresh air, was wide open. Now, French windows admit much air; and the river murmur, which entered thereby, was less cosy than the crackle of a fire, though mayhap more poetical.

"My dear," he said, as Genefer entered, "don't you think there's a feel of winter in the air to-night?"

Genefer took the hint and closed the window. She really did not mind much, as long as the little people up above slept in hygienic surroundings, and she could answer for their windows, at any rate.

"Isaac," she said, sinking into a low chair and stretching out her toes luxuriously, — she wore velvet slippers, being as nimble as a shoemaker now in recovering worn school ones, — "Isaac, do you know I had a visitor to-day, — somebody we have n't seen for a long time."

"Who?" said Isaac. One does not attempt vivacity or grammar after a day's work with boys.

"John Saxon has come back to Silphine. He's been at Beara to-day. I was angry at first, but I see it's all for the best now. She's had a hard time ever since he went away; and, anyway, to have your own man's a comforting thing, though he may n't be up to much."

"But do you think she'll take him, after all the other to-do?"

"The other to-do," said Genefer, sharply; "and whose fault was that, I should like to know? I'm not going to give away my own sex even to you; but every woman is n't made of putty, to be twisted into any shape a man may choose to please. We've got our own devils inside of us, our own bodies and minds, as well as you; and they lead some of us a pretty dance before we've taken and wrung the necks of some parts of 'em."

"I never quite got to the bottom of Silphine's affair."

"No, I don't suppose you did. But I've watched her and been sorry, many's the time, that I could n't help her more."

The whole energy of Genefer's nature had become now an instinct to help. "But," she went on, "it's more difficult to help a woman than a man, and it's especially hard to help a Rosdew."

"But you're a Rosdew," smiled Isaac, who had a very genuine admiration for his wife.

"You know," answered Genefer, "Granny Rosdew sort of founded our family of girls."

She glanced as she spoke at her own private bookshelf, where the works of a certain great scientific French novelist stood side by side with the books on physiology and hygiene.

"She used to say that we'd run to seed because we were all girls. Well, if that was so, I used to think, anyway, I'd see to it that I was good seed. 'T is n't a

bad thing to be, after all, and so I tried," she added simply; "and so did Silphine in her way, but she had more to fight than I. We girls all had a bit of Granny Rosdew in us, but Silphine had the most, — plenty of the pride of life, to say nothing of the lust of the flesh. Granny was n't simple and good, for she 'd most things human in her. And that 's where Rosemary got her lightness from, too."

"But Rosemary seemed much altered when she brought Cupidon back to school."

"Ay," said Genefer; "but did n't you see her poor face when she left him, all twisted up with trying not to cry? You see, she 's never sure when she will have to give him back to his real parents; and every day he 's away from her, even with us, she feels so much loss to her. This is n't a world for little people like Rosemary, and she 'll be more and more lonely when Cupidon grows up and she can't follow his thoughts. I 've read and read, to try not to let my boy feel that his mother does n't understand things."

It was a revelation of the simple body's ideal. She walked to the window to hide her eyes from Isaac.

"What will these two do?" asked he, after a pause. "I suppose he has no money. He might come for a time and help with the boys till he and Silphine have looked about them a bit."

"You dear," said Genefer, with a rather hysterical laugh, as she gave a sounding smack on Isaac's bald patch, "that 's just what I wanted you to say."

"And why did n't you say it yourself?"

"Well, after all, it 's your school, and he 's my cousin's man."

"And who made the school what it is?"

"And," said Genefer, stretching out her arms with a sigh of relief, "we 'll get rid of one of those weary, weary lads."

She referred to the assistant masters, who were the chief thorn in her side, — lads fresh from college who came to experiment, for a small salary, on the minds of the boys, in order to equip themselves for better-paid work with a certificate of experience. They failed to understand Genefer's homely worth, and above all they scorned Isaac's small amount of scholarship, of course an absolutely fatal trait in his wife's eyes. The only point their inexperienced elegance did appreciate in Genefer was her table, and even this was liable to haricot and other lapses. Only one of them managed, by means of an attack of rheumatic fever, to get below the quaint sharpness of that interfering woman's way.

"With their noses in the air for ever and ever," said Genefer, opening the window and stepping out into the balcony; "John Saxon 's cured of that, anyhow."

The cold air refreshed her tired eyes, as she stood watching the village lights dart out one by one from small, square cottage windows. Paradise Place next door was always dark, for Lawyer Juliff had gone long since to join his Sara under the much-meditated tombstone which the trees now hid from Genefer's eyes.

She held her breath for a second as a flaming meteor came flying out of the sky towards Widdicombe. She almost seemed to hear it hiss, as it flamed out into darkness. From what great tracts of space had it come to earth; out of what unknown gulf came the children for whose future she worked so eagerly; and to what unknown destinies might she and Silphine open the gates of life in the coming years? She repeated to herself Dr. Grimwood's words: —

"Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" Genefer knew what he meant by the Lords of Life. And then she found Isaac standing behind her, and had a little weep on his shoulder because Silphine would not be alone any more either; for Genefer was very womanly in these days, with her little child asleep upstairs in the cool darkness; no night-lights or closed windows for her hygienic soul.

Chapter XXVII

Strophe and Antistrophe

THUD, thud, went the pickaxe in the soft, dark earth; six feet down in the cutting stood the two brawny, sweating figures that worked it. The horn lanterns stuck on slanting poles, swung forward over the grave, each with a misty halo of fog round it, through which gleamed the yellow rays from the tallow dips within. A white moth hovered round one of the lanterns, striking itself again and again in its efforts to get at the light. Nothing could be seen at the surface of the ground but shadowy headstones, nothing heard but the faint rustling of a single tree.

"Iss," said the elder of the two men, wiping his face with a red, spotted handkerchief; "'t is pretty nigh three years since I took to thiccy. Tealing 'em in, till you be tealed yourself: that 's about the size of it. Lord, how it do catch a man's back, this here tealing."

Sam lifted himself straight, rubbing a fist into the small of his back and carefully screwing up his left eye.

"Whatever maggot got into old Jenny Hammick's

head to go off the very day her nurse-cheeld had made up her mind to commit matrimony on, is more than I can tell."

"But 't was kept from the bride, so I heerd," said the other; "and her 's been a poor pilgarlic this year back, has Jenny. Well, we must all come to it; and marryin' 's marryin', and buryin' 's buryin', and there 's no going from either, when 't is laid down."

"Right you be, Sam; that's right. And 't was 'I do love 'ee' with him and her t' other night, I heerd; and when you 've come to that pass, there 's nothing for it but passon and his book."

"But, Lordie, what a change passon and his book do work in 'ee! Never the same man again, that you bain't."

"Did 'ee ever hear how Dicory Credicott and his missus got sorted out?"

"Never."

"Well, Dic and her sot down alongside of each other in a bit of a garden chair, and he was turning it over in his mind how he could best let daylight in on the matter, being timid-like."

"Ah, poor sawl."

"Well, a thought and a thought. They was sitting back to back, not to seem too hobnobbish. At last a turns to her and says, 'Love 's a terruble thing,' and with that, her turns too and says, 'Most mortal.' And next Sunday they put the banns up."

"But you can never tell how 't will turn out any more than Mrs. Gribble's lickie pie. I allays do say holy matrimony 's like lickie pie."

"You 'm allays full of old ancient tales."

"Well, 't was like this here. Mrs. Gribble lived down to Ivyton, and one Sunday her said to her little cheeld, 'There is n't nothen in the house, but you run and cut some licks, and us 'll put a layer of licks and then a layer of baccon in a pie dish, and then some crame, and now on with the crust and off to bakehouse with it. But mind you run and fetch 'en afore folks come out of church, for I don't want all Ivyton to know us has lickie pie for dinner.'"

"Well?"

"The pie was fetched and a piece cut out, when her calls out, 'Awh, my dear soul, what a pie this be! how the baccon be a-swelled out and the licks all turned to gravy; a lovely pie it is, sure 'nuff.' When they 'd ate up all that pie, there came a knocking to the door and a kicking up of Bob's a-dying, 'Mrs. Gribble, Mrs. Gribble, what have 'ee done with our lambie pie?'

"But Mrs. Gribble would have to her dying day that 't was lickie and not lambie pie. So 't is with matrimony, you can never tell how 't will turn out."

"And so 't will ever be, else Gabriel may go tootle up his horn to-once. But, Lor-a-massy, it do get that tiring, the same old nag, nag, and the same old tales, and the same old face on the piller."

"'T is all like Gammer Ough when you 've been tied up a good few years. Did 'ee ever hear tell of Gammer Ough and her burying?"

"Not that I mind."

"Well, the door to the burying-yard up to Cornworthy is between two postesses, and the path is n't overwide. Now Gaffer Ough's wife — her swelled up terruble — was being buried there, and the bearers shook the coffin. But the shake they give her was answered, as you mid say, by a shake inside the coffin. They unscrewed the lid there and then, and, if you 'll believe me, they found they 'd been on the point o' burying Gammer alive. Her lived pretty nigh three years after that; but when they carried her body in again between the postesses, Gaffer, the mate of her buzzum, goes up to the bearers eager-like and says, 'Don't 'ee shake her now, don't 'ee; there 's dear sawls.'"

"'T is a hoary old reprobate you be; iss, 't is," said Ned.

"Ay," said Sam, "love 's a bewitchment; for fevers and judgments there 's nothen like a flock of sheep driven through the house, but sheep is n't no good for a bewitchment. But they tell me the newly wed 'll settle down to Widdicombe, so us 'll see how they do fare.

"Well, here 's to 'em," continued he, raising the big-handled mug, with a picture of a boy driving sheep on it, to his lips; "here 's to the young pair, and may 'em never put lips to worse tipple than this."

After a long drink he wiped the edge of the mug with his sleeve and passed it to Ned.

"Here's to 'em," repeated he, with a solemn cadence that brought back the droning voice of the parson on a Sunday; "here's to 'em, and may 'em live long in the land to drink, and die happy at the latter end!"

THE END